

“ON THE MAT”: AN EXPLORATION OF THE IMPACT OF NEW ENTRANT
CHILDREN’S CLASSROOM AND HOME EXPERIENCES ON THEIR
UNDERSTANDINGS OF WHAT COUNTS AS READING

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the Degree
of
Master of Arts
in the
University of Canterbury
by
Michelle Clarke

University of Canterbury

2007

CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	x
LIST OF FIGURES	xi
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	xii
ABSTRACT	xv
CHAPTER ONE	
WHAT’S THE STORY WITH READING? - AN INTRODUCTION	1
Defining reading	1
Research on emergent literacy	3
What led me to this study	5
Filling in the gaps in my understanding of emergent reading	10
Research questions	12
Presentation of the thesis	12
CHAPTER TWO	
SEEKING ANSWERS: EVOLUTION OF A METHODOLOGY	15
Selecting a methodology	15
The influence of Graham Nuthall’s research methodology	19
Development of the design for the study	21
The initial design	21
School – access and profile	22
Room 1 – Miss B’s classroom	23
The negotiated design	23
Revised research design	24

Selection of focus children	25
Informed consent	27
Data collection	28
Classroom data collection	29
Placing and testing video and audio-recording equipment	29
Audio-recording - microphones	29
Recording audio-tracks onto video-recordings	30
Trialling and familiarisation of the equipment and coding schedule of observational data	30
Classroom observations and recordings	31
Observation schedule – 15-second interval records	31
The final classroom observation timeline	34
Observation schedule	36
Coding strategy	36
Observer's role	37
Artifacts	37
Analysis of classroom data	38
Transcribing and coding observational data	38
Group reading – coding directly from video and audio-recordings	42
Coding from video and audio-recordings	42
Coding from the focus child's audio-track	43
Reliability	44
Interviews	45
Interview timeline	46
Coding the interview	47

Interview structure	50
Coding interview data	51
Issues of bias	52
Reliability – interviews	53
Generalisability	54
Summary of methodology	55
CHAPTER THREE	
“...EVERYTHING’S NOT READING”: HEARING THE CHILDREN’S VOICES	56
The significance of children’s voices	56
The children talk about reading	57
Bomber talks about reading	57
Briar talks about reading	60
The selection of themes	62
The three themes	64
Classroom routines	64
Reading groups	65
Home-school connections	65
Putting events in context – frameworks for discussion of the three themes	65
Whole language and phonics – reading instruction in New Zealand	66
The three worlds of children	70
CHAPTER FOUR	
“DO WE HAVE TO COLOUR IT IN?” – CLASSROOM ROUTINES	78
Defining routines	79
A typical morning in Room 1	80

The first activity	80
Whole-class reading activities	81
Individual reading activity – the worksheet	81
Small-group reading activity	82
Free choice activities	82
The final activity	82
Miss B's routine	83
Learning goals	84
Management	86
The ways in which learning and management merge in Room 1	87
Miss B's routines in relation to the literature and the children's understandings	90
Examining children's experiences of routines – the worksheet activity	95
Completing the worksheet	97
Worksheet instruction	97
Doing the worksheet	99
Task related discussion	101
Monitoring peers' performance	102
The significance of colour	103
Off-task discussion	104
Maintaining friendships	104
Managing what the teacher sees	106
Submitting completed worksheets	108
Features of rules and routines that influence the ways in which children engage with reading materials	108

Time on-task – a summary	109
The three worlds of children	110
Following instructions	111
Formal and informal elements of activities	113
Agendas	114
Questions to ponder – issues of balance	117
Security and predictability	118
Taking on the good student role	119
Being seen to be a good student	121
Shared understandings	123
CHAPTER FIVE	
BEING AN ELEPHANT: LEARNING ABOUT READING GROUPS	126
Where reading groups sit within the general reading programme	127
How the reading group contributed to other activities	128
Defining the reading group activity	129
Time spent in reading groups – what happened when the routine changed	131
Time spent reading aloud	132
Time spent chorusing	133
Time spent reading individually	133
The number of words read during reading group	134
Types of responses made when reading aloud	136
Types of responses during chorusing	137
Types of responses during round robin reading	139
What other skills were the children practising during reading group?	142
Introduction and review	142

Chorusing	143
Round robin	145
Feedback and prompting	147
The impact of round robin reading on reading practice	150
Managing the roles of learner and reader	153
Was the children's emphasis on words and sounds an accurate reflection of the instruction provided?	155
CHAPTER SIX	
"IT'S MORE FUNNER" – READING AT HOME	159
Changes in Briar's life	160
Preschool experiences	160
Bedtime stories	161
Library visits	164
Kindergarten – the children's views	165
Kindergarten – the mothers' views	167
Kindergarten – the teachers' views	168
Formal reading instruction	170
Fun and games	172
Changes that occurred as a result of school entry	174
Reading as a homework activity	175
Homework – match or mismatch?	179
Miss B's aims	179
Nicky and Lucy's interpretations of the purposes of reading homework	181
The children's interpretations of the homework task	184

How the children read aloud during interviews	186
Bomber	186
School books	187
Non-school books	188
Briar	188
School books	189
Non-school books	189
Issues for further consideration	191
Status of school reading	191
Engagement with reading	195
CHAPTER SEVEN	
WHAT COUNTS AS READING: THE VISIBLE VS THE INVISIBLE	199
Making the invisible visible – key findings	199
The public performance – merely the tip of the iceberg	203
Illusions in the public world – hidden depths or sleight of hand?	206
Task engagement – navigating around the iceberg	212
Partnerships – a rescue mission or teamwork?	215
Constraints	218
Further research	219
Briar has the final word	220
REFERENCES	222
APPENDICES	232
1. Human Ethics Committee approval	232
2. Information sheets	233
3. Completed worksheets	235

4. R.E.A.D. I.T. pages	239
5. Interview topics	241
6. <i>Big</i> worksheets	242
7. <i>A</i> worksheets	244
8. <i>K</i> worksheet	246

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE

1. Observation Schedule for Bomber for Day 1	32
2. Observation Schedule for Briar for Day 1	32
3. Observations Schedule for Bomber for Week 6	33
4. Schedule of Classroom Recordings	35
5. Transcript of a 15-second Interval During a Reading Group for Bomber on 02/06/04 at 09.36.45	40
6. Transcript of a 15-second Interval During a Reading Group for Bomber on 02/06/04 at 09.37.00	40
7. Coding Categories for Data Analysis	41
8. Summary of Time Spent on Each Reading Task	127
9. The Number of Minutes the Bomber and Briar Spent Reading Aloud During Reading Group Task	132
10. The Number of Words Bomber and Briar Read During Reading Groups	135
11. Percentage of Types of Responses Bomber and Briar Made During Chorused Reading	138
12. Percentage of Types of Responses Bomber and Briar Made During Round Robin Reading	140
13. Percentage of Types of Parental Comments Recorded in R.E.A.D. I.T. Books	182
14. Bomber and Briar's Scores on Letter and Word Identification Tasks Approximately One Month After School Entry	196

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURES

- | | |
|---|-----|
| 1. Seating arrangements for desk work. | 100 |
| 2. The way in which reading attitude and practice may contribute to reading progress. | 197 |

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Getting to the point where I can tell this story has included moments of comedy and drama, and would not have been possible without the support and encouragement of a great many people. An amazing cast of characters provided me with everything from the story line and ways to interpret events, to the paper and pencils to write it all down, and the coffee that ensured that I stayed awake long enough to transfer the words to the computer screen.

I could not have completed this thesis without the generous support of the staff and the students of Oakville school. To “Miss B” and the children in Room 1, thank you for allowing me to spend so many hours in your classroom. A special thank you to Bomber, Briar and their families, for welcoming me into their homes and sharing their experiences with me so openly. This story would never have existed without your participation. It has been a privilege. Thank you also to Susan Lovett, for making the process of finding a school for my study so much easier than it might otherwise have been.

The Graham Nuthall Classroom Research Trust Award I received 2004/05 has provided me with the time and facilities I needed for analysis and writing. I am grateful to the Trustees for their constant support throughout the research process.

Many of the staff in the School of Education, past and present, have assisted me throughout the study. Special thanks go to Elody Rathgen and Sue Besley for encouraging me to take the first step in this process. Who could have predicted what that “working” breakfast would lead to? John Church and Mick Grimley – thank you for continuing to challenge me to look at learning from multiple perspectives, and for ensuring that I continued to work with students throughout

my time on this project. Felicity Craig, thanks for your understanding and patience in the early stages of the study as our office became increasingly cluttered with research-related materials. Roger Corbett, I could never have managed the technical equipment, or the computer without your expertise and endless patience. Thank you so much.

I am also indebted to the late Emeritus Professor Graham Nuthall. Graham's way of looking at children's learning has had a profound effect on my understanding of what teaching and learning are all about. His generosity, encouragement, advice and friendship in the early stages of the study were invaluable.

A special thanks to the many children whose reading stories have indirectly contributed to this study over the past 20 years, especially Emily, Matthew, James, Edward, Alex, Julia, Kate, Hamish, Robert, Rebecca, the two Zoes, Rik, Coral, Sean, and Jai.

I have no doubt that I could not have completed this story without the ongoing support of my friends and my family. Thanks, everyone. Sonya, thank you so much for your constant encouragement and for the many long hours of transcribing. Cherie, Vaughan, Louise, Vanessa, David, and Tom – many thanks for your unflagging support and good humour. Aaron, Bridgette, Chris, Nicky, Carol, Tracey, Baljit, Leona, Steve, Anthea, Karen, and Mike – thank you for your encouragement, for the countless conversations and the gentle reality checks along the way. Ria, thanks for your help on Chapter Three, when I was hearing more than the children's voices in my head! Jocelyn, Gillian, Simi and Kristi – thanks for all your electronic encouragement in the late stages of the writing process. You have no idea how much it helped.

As always, I get to the key point, or the key people in this case, at the end. (Topic sentences never were my strong point.) There are six people who have seen this story through from beginning to

end, and without whom I would never have finished the thesis. Alison and Elody – your supervision has been critical (ha, got it in after all) in getting me to this point. Your patience, wisdom, humour and guidance have been much appreciated. Having struggled to meet deadlines throughout the study, it is to your credit that I managed to keep the final one. I shall miss our Wednesday meetings.

Kellie and Kyle – what can I say? You have been my sounding boards, advisors and friends, and you have constantly been there for me. I thank you for all your practical support (who knew how much proof reading one small study would generate?), and for your ability to remain unflappable when I could not. I owe you one.

To my parents, Elaine and Gordon, you have always encouraged me to look beyond simple answers, which stood me in good stead for the process of writing this thesis. Your unstinting love and support has been beyond anything I could have hoped for, and certainly more than I deserved. I cannot thank you enough.

This thesis is dedicated to my nephews Josh, Logan and Jack, to my niece, Zoe, and to Jellybean. You continue to inspire me, and to remind me every day how important it is to listen to children's voices.

ABSTRACT

This study explores the ways that the classroom and home experiences of two New Entrant children contributed to their understandings of what counts as reading. Multiple method data collection included continuous recordings of classroom reading activities over a 16-week period and interviews undertaken over a 13-month period. Microanalysis of classroom events provided accounts of the children's engagement with reading tasks during reading instruction, which were then explored in relation to the ways the two children discussed reading during interviews. Findings revealed that children take on multiple roles during classroom activities which impact on their participation in reading tasks. The significance of the social aspects of learning to read is also highlighted. It was revealed that what children actually learned and the types of reading responses they made during class activities were only rarely visible or audible to their teacher. The children's management of their learning environment meant that many reading opportunities were used in different ways from those intended by the teacher, and that learning was often only indirectly related to teaching. The implication for teachers is the need to consider how little of children's learning experiences are audible or visible to them, so that they can develop strategies to provide appropriate reading instruction and adequate reading experiences. The study also revealed the critical role that "homework" (reading at home) plays in ensuring sufficient reading practice for emergent and early readers.

Chapter One

WHAT'S THE STORY WITH READING? - AN INTRODUCTION

“Um, can I read you this?”

I cannot recall how often young children have asked me this question. Sometimes they have been referring to a book, but often they have wanted to share other things - a story they have written, something they have drawn, a logo in a mall or something on television. Therefore, I am always intrigued when children ask to read to me because I am never quite sure what will follow. Children read in various ways, depending on their age, their reading knowledge and skills, and their personal definitions of what counts as reading. Sometimes, reading is an opportunity for children to perform; on other occasions, it is actually a request for me to read to them; and sometimes, it is just a good reason to spend some time together. Generally, this interaction is based around some form of text, although not necessarily a book. The word *read* can have multiple meanings, depending on each child's intentions at any particular moment. This study was designed in an attempt to understand how young children define and describe the act of reading.

Defining reading

I have struggled to come up with a precise yet detailed description of reading that accurately represents my understanding of this complex concept. I turned to texts about reading instruction, seeking a more specific definition. After all, if teachers are to teach children to read, then it is important to begin with a clear understanding of what it is that children are supposed to be learning. If texts about reading instruction are designed to promote positive learning outcomes for students, then surely they include definitions of reading. I found explanations and descriptions of reading

strategies and contexts, but few texts that actually defined reading. More frequently, texts talked around the topic of reading instruction without clearly identifying the basic assumptions about what qualified as reading.

Searfoss, Readence and Mallette (2001) identified reading as a “basic form of print literacy. Reading is used as a language tool for communication, purposefully and intentionally... It goes beyond simply understanding what is read” (pp. 4-5). To expand, and clarify their definition Searfoss et al. cited Glazer and Searfoss (1988):

Reading is receiving ideas, experiences, feelings, emotions and concepts. It is an activity that permits one to gain vast knowledge. When reading, we can live and travel vicariously and become acquainted with people and events of the past that have shaped our worlds. Reading creates for us mental maps of events so that ideas can be transmitted from the mind of one, the author, to the mind of another-the receiver/reader.

(in Searfoss et al, 2001, p. 5)

A number of the texts I read focused on this more basic definition of reading, or a particular feature of it. Some focused on particular skills and knowledge that teachers needed in order to teach reading (e.g., Wilson, Hall, Leu, & Kinzer, 2001), while others outlined literacy activities to use with young readers (e.g., Adams, Foorman, Lundberg, & Beeler, 1998). Articles commonly discussed the importance of comprehension and making meaning from print (e.g., Smolkin & Donovan, 2001) or they focused on decoding, word recognition and word attack skills (e.g., Tunmer & Chapman, 1999). One of the common features of reading related literature was discussion of particular skills that were characteristic of, or required by, good readers, but a clear definition of reading remained elusive.

Michel (1994) questions whether a single definition of reading is even possible. She argues that research highlighting the social nature of literacy (e.g., Bogdan, 1982; Teale, 1984) has revealed that interactions are central to the construction of meaning. Multiple definitions of reading are required because, although every reading event involves interactions, particular acts of reading serve different purposes and occur across a range of settings. Nicholson (2000) highlighted another reason for difficulty in obtaining a single definition of reading when describing the range of theories

underpinning discussions of the reading process. He made the point that individuals describe reading in a variety of ways, either skills-based or meaning driven, depending on their underlying theories of the reading process itself.

Some researchers have attempted to provide simpler definitions. Pinsent (2002) wrote “reading in its *broadest* definition is seen as the construction of meaning from any language cue and therefore is present in all strands of the curriculum” (p. 226). She acknowledged that her discussion of New Zealand reading programmes focused on reading “more *narrowly* as the process by which meaning is constructed from a written text, and where the focus is on the written word and on students becoming fluent decoders and comprehenders of what they read” (p. 226). This narrow definition appears to me to be a “working” description that may be helpful for teachers teaching young readers.

Research on Emergent Reading

When I began reading more specifically around the topic of emergent reading, in preparation for this study, I discovered that there were a large number of texts (including those listed above) that advised “what to do” if I was teaching reading. Manuals and literature about strategies provided advice about the types of interactions that promote reading achievement, about theories that contribute to positive outcomes, and about effective teaching practices. While the teachers’ intentions and understandings were evident, children’s theories of reading were not included. Some texts focused on reading for meaning and others described the importance of decoding for beginning readers. Duffy and Hoffman (1999) reported similar findings, noting that the focus of much of the research and literature about reading instruction appeared to be on particular methods and how these could be used to correct or improve performance, rather than discussing the complexities of teaching reading. While it was acknowledged that it was difficult to define reading, it appeared that reading instruction, in contrast, was often a simple matter of using the right method.

This focus on method appears to follow the research trends that were prominent during particular periods, much of which focused on the ongoing debate between

advocates of whole language and phonics approaches to reading instruction. Pearson (1993) discussed the common types of reading research during the 1970s to 1990s, highlighting the work on effective teaching, comprehension, word identification, intervention and the impact of construction on reading. Again, there was seldom if any reference to children's understandings of reading. "Understanding" appeared in relation to comprehension, or following instructions, but was not discussed in reference to what reading is all about.

I tried a number of key words during searches, and decided that I had somehow missed the one word that would open up this world of children's reading to me. It was reassuring to find that Pressley, Allington, Wharton-McDonald, Block and Morrow (2001) had noted a similar pattern. Pressley et al. also commented on the prolific writing about "what should happen" in classrooms and teacher "manuals" (p. 50). They found a host of observational studies in classrooms that advocated a particular approach to instruction rather than teaching more generally. Pressley et al. (2001) endeavoured to address this by undertaking observational studies of effective teaching, that was teacher-centred research.

Smith (1995) has argued for more than a decade that although we talk about being child-centred in our educational practices in New Zealand, we fail to listen to children's voices in educational settings. The number of studies that focus directly on children in classrooms and what they know and learn are still limited (Bondy, 1999). I found little recent child-centred research that focused on children's understanding of reading. The nature of research around children's understandings of reading has evolved over time as research methods have developed and social constructivist theories have become more dominant. Early studies in the 1960s and 1970s (e.g., Reid, 1966) used adult definitions of reading to classify children's definitions. Children's responses were usually obtained through structured questions and then presented in relation to adult views of reading and discussed in deficit terms, with a focus on what was missing rather than what the children actually said. In more contemporary studies in the 1980s and 1990s (e.g., Dahlgren & Olsson, 1986, cited in Hinchman & Michel, 1999; Michel, 1994) children's descriptions, rather than adult

notions of reading, form the basis of any discussion of children's understandings of reading.

There are still only a small number of studies seeking children's perspectives on reading, and even fewer that involve data collection in the classroom. Smith (e.g., 1995) spent a considerable period of time arguing for children's voices to become more dominant in research. Briggs and Nichols's (2001) review of research on childhood reveals that although children are often the subjects of research, researchers often focus on what children become and what happens *to* them. Children's interpretations of their experiences are seldom discussed, although they acknowledge that there have been examples of child-centred research emerging from New Zealand (including Smith's research) and Nordic countries in the past 20 years. Their question, and mine, is whether it is appropriate to study children without giving them a voice.

What led me to this study

One of the child-centred studies acknowledged by Briggs and Nichols (2001), although not directly related to reading, had a considerable impact on the way I have approached my study. As an undergraduate, and then postgraduate student, I began to look at learning in a new way, through the work of Professor Graham Nuthall. His research was to become the primary influence for my study, and his methodology formed the basis of my data collection procedures. Professor Nuthall and his colleagues developed a methodology that put individual children, rather than the teacher, at the centre of classroom activity. This methodology revealed that although teaching and learning intersect, they are often only indirectly connected, frequently in unpredictable ways (Nuthall, 2005).

Nuthall's classroom research was intended to support teachers, by providing them with information about what was actually happening in their classrooms, highlighting events that were generally not audible or visible to even the most alert teacher (Nuthall, 2005). The research of Nuthall and his colleague Alton-Lee (Alton-Lee & Nuthall, 1992, 1998) revealed patterns of learning that allowed them to generate learning theory, while acknowledging that each child has individual and unique

learning experiences. This classroom research provided teachers with “tools” and argued that “teachers need understandings that inform their moment by moment instructional decisions in particular contexts. Not prescriptions” (1998, p. 6). The emphasis on individual experiences within group settings and the importance of informing rather than providing specific direction challenges teachers to reconsider relying on the many reading instruction manuals that Pressley et al. (2001) commented on.

I began tutoring in a preservice teacher education programme during my Honours year, working with Year 2 students in a compulsory teaching and learning course co-ordinated by Professor Nuthall. Having begun to look at Nuthall’s research on learning as a student, I now began to look at teaching in a different way as I observed other students grappling with his theory of learning. I became increasingly sensitive to the focus of the discussions I had with preservice teachers during tutorial exercises. Although we were talking about issues related to learning and teaching, these discussions were generally framed from a teacher’s perspective.

As students themselves these preservice teachers were very much in a learner role. However, they did not find it easy to discuss issues and strategies in relation to what the children, or learners, might actually be experiencing. They talked of making tasks interesting and exciting; they talked about how strategies might contribute to learning outcomes; and they talked about children’s achievement. All of these features of classroom experiences are positive, and appropriate at the students’ level of experience, but the strategies they discussed were often very specific and assumed that all children would benefit from their teaching in the same way, rather than reflecting the broader notion of individual learning discussed in lectures and tutorials.

What was generally missing during my discussions with preservice teachers was the notion that children might learn something other than what the teacher intended (unless it was an error), or that it was necessary to check that teachers and students shared understandings of what reading (or maths, or science) actually involved. If children were progressing and meeting learning outcomes, then it was assumed that children had learned the content and any related skills correctly. Several colleagues

suggested that this might be about the students' own development – as preservice teachers, they had little classroom experience and were focused on teaching rather than learning.

My experiences as one of Professor Nuthall's postgraduate students revealed that preservice teachers' lack of experience did not provide an adequate explanation for the invisibility of children in our discussions about learning. During discussions with fellow students, many of whom were very experienced teachers, I found that teachers struggled to disentangle teaching and learning when describing how they knew that their teaching had gone well. Teachers usually used outcome criteria and levels of engagement to determine what children have learned, just as preservice teachers did. Nuthall (2005) challenged this view of learning, arguing that children may have been busy, but unless teachers were aware of what the children knew before a unit or lesson and what they had *actually* learned during the course of instruction then teachers may not have been talking about learning at all – they may simply have been talking about teaching and management.

Nuthall's (2001a) research has exposed the myth that engagement, or "on-task" behaviour, is an indicator of learning. Nuthall's research has revealed that on-task behaviour is actually more often about children being busy than about them learning. Nuthall's (2002) central argument is that "teaching remains a cultural ritual" (p. 44) despite constant claims that teaching is innovative and changing over time to better meet the needs of diverse groups and individuals. Keeping students busy, or on-task, remains part of the traditional pattern of classroom management that reveals little about individual student learning and does not provide teachers with information about children's developing knowledge or understandings.

As a tutor, I had been confident that I was focused on learning, and experienced some frustration that preservice teachers had such difficulty in taking a child's perspective. As a postgraduate student I discovered first hand how difficult it was to get past taking the teacher role when I completed one of the course assignments in a primary classroom. Each of Professor Nuthall's assignments was designed to expose students to the impact of classroom rituals on teaching, challenging us to consider the

relationship between teaching and learning. Our task was to find out what children had learnt during a particular unit. We took two roles during this assignment, one as teacher and the other as researcher.

As a teacher, I prepared a brief unit and presented it to a class of Year 2/3 students. I was aware that children had to engage with lesson content several times in order to learn and remember (Nuthall & Alton-Lee, 1994), and arranged material accordingly. I was also aware of the multiple sociocultural contexts operating in the classroom, which Nuthall and his colleagues (Alton-Lee, Nuthall, & Patrick, 1999; Nuthall, 2001a) have described as the three “worlds” of children: the public world of classroom activities; the semi-private world of peer interactions; and the private world of the individual child. While the public world is visible and audible to teachers, the other two are seldom evident. My second role, as a researcher, provided me with the opportunity to explore the semi-private and private worlds to some degree, as I interviewed individual children before and following the unit.

The researcher role required me to establish what children had learnt during the unit I taught. Although acutely aware that what children learnt may not have been directly related to the content taught (Nuthall, 2000a) I failed to follow the children’s lead when talking with them. While I determined which components of the lesson content each child had learnt, I did not discover what else the children had learnt. To find out what children had actually learnt, I should have stepped back from specific questions about the lesson content and looked at what was most important about the unit from the children’s perspective. Had I done so, I would have been able to present a more accurate and detailed picture of what they had learnt during the unit beyond the content itself, and have had a much better understanding of their actual learning experience. What I discovered was that it was much easier to “talk about” Professor Nuthall’s research than it was to “practise” it in a classroom.

My experiences as a tutor and as a student also made it clear how important child-centred classroom research was in developing a better understanding of children’s learning. Without an awareness of what children are actually learning, it is difficult to focus on effective teaching or to look beyond methods and strategies. It is

understandable that teachers focused on strategies and models of best practice when they had so little evidence of student learning available to them (Nuthall, 2005). The relationship between teaching and learning is complex, and connections between the two are often indirect.

At the end of my first year of tutoring I worked as a research assistant for Professor Nuthall on a project about language development. The project required me to engage in everyday play activities with children and their mothers, while audio-recordings of our verbal interactions were taped. Taking the role of participant observer made me increasingly aware of the roles different children took in their home environments. All children were learning to talk, but the nature of the interactions varied across the homes I visited during the study. In a similar manner to Nuthall's (2001b) classroom findings, it became evident that individual children participating in the same, or similar, activities were learning quite different things. What emerged was a way of hearing children's voices in a manner that mirrored Nuthall's classroom research.

I did not talk directly to the children or their mothers about learning to talk. Their voices were heard, not through interviews, but through what Michel (1994) refers to as "kid watching" (p. 8), as I observed the children participating in everyday activities. The data also revealed much more than patterns of language development. Listening to children and watching them interacting with toys and other people revealed their understandings of what counted as play, what behaviour was appropriate and their roles in the context of play. It was difficult for me to separate one aspect of children's experience from others.

While tutoring preservice teachers I also began working with a small number of struggling readers. The importance of children's voice, and establishing what children learned at school became evident once more. The children's teachers provided me with a wealth of information about the strengths and weaknesses of each child's reading performance and achievement in relation to decoding and comprehension. This information was extremely helpful in structuring activities to improve reading, and ensured that I prepared materials at an appropriate level. However, as I talked with the children about their understanding of reading tasks and worked through

activities with them, I realised that there was a gap between what the teacher told me about how children “did” reading (their skills and knowledge of strategies) and children’s understandings of reading. What reading meant to them was not necessarily in line with the tasks they were expected to complete at school.

The children I worked with had all experienced at least three years of repeated failure during class tasks, which had impacted on their levels of motivation and, in turn, had contributed to task avoidance. I found that I only began to make progress with these children (beyond particular skills in isolation) when I had a sense of their understandings of what reading was all about, that is, I heard their voices. These children had never been asked to describe reading. Their understandings were inferred indirectly from indicators in the public world of the classroom. This mirrored Nuthall’s (2004a, 2005) finding that learning is assessed using indirect measures that often relate more to effective management, or busy-ness, than to learning.

Filling in the gaps in my understanding of emergent reading

At this point my interests in reading and learning come together. While Nuthall’s studies were based around children learning specific concepts in science or social studies units, I wanted to focus directly on the broader notion of reading. Reading is compulsory throughout much of children’s school lives and is central to success in other subjects (McNaughton, 2002; Pressley, 2002). The strategies children develop during their school life determine how effectively they decode and take meaning from print. Children’s ability to read conventionally and competently in the ‘school’ way determines their progress at school.

Given the emphasis on reading and the complexity of the concept, it is important to examine what learning to read involves. Michel (1994) has argued that reading instruction will only be effective if teachers have an understanding of what children mean when they talk about reading. Children, as “consumers” (Lansdown, 1994, cited in Smith, 1995. p. 4) in the school system are, in many ways, in the best position to inform teaching practice by sharing their interpretations and perceptions of school experiences with teachers and researchers. Smith and Taylor (2000) put it succinctly

when they stressed, “children are not the passive recipients of an adult’s teaching” (p. 3). Simply because teachers or parents define reading in a particular way and teach children particular skills and strategies, it does not mean that skills and knowledge are merely transferred, or that children will interpret reading in the same way.

Children’s individual understandings make an important contribution to their participation in classroom and home activities, and contribute to their understanding of the purposes of reading activities, the way in which they approach tasks and their future achievement and attitudes to reading. So it is important to explore children’s experiences within school from their perspective, rather than relying on adult reporting or assessment of children’s public performances as the sole indicators of learning and understanding. A deeper understanding of children’s classroom experiences is necessary if researchers and teachers are to get a holistic sense of how they might influence children’s developing sense of what reading is all about and provide appropriate learning opportunities.

Pressley et al.’s (2001) classroom research has contributed to this by observing events during reading instruction and describing characteristics of teaching events that contribute to positive learning outcomes. My study differs from their work in two key ways. First, I elected to focus on what the children do during reading instruction, rather than the teacher’s actions. Second, I was reluctant to focus solely on measures of achievement or performance as Pressley et al. did because of Nuthall’s (2001b, 2004a) argument that what is evident at the public level may not accurately reflect children’s private understandings of task requirements. While reading progress and achievement are likely to contribute to children’s understanding of reading, my main focus was on the way(s) in which what children know about reading and what they regard as important in reading influence their engagement with reading tasks, the strategies they use and the value placed on particular activities.

Research questions

This study was designed to find out how children learned about reading from their perspective. The fundamental questions I am asking in the thesis are:

How do children define reading?

What do children do during reading activities in the classroom?

How do classroom experiences contribute to children's understandings of reading?

Presentation of the thesis

This thesis is a story. At first glance this story is nothing extraordinary. It is essentially an everyday story about two children entering a typical New Entrant classroom in New Zealand. What is extraordinary about this story is that the children have provided me with an opportunity to retell it from their point of view rather than presenting their teacher's perspective. They have talked about reading and learning to read, they have described the act of reading and they have allowed me to observe their reading experiences in the classroom. They have also read to me at home. They have shown me how they read in a way that is not normally shared with adults, which has been a rare privilege. My role is that of interpreter and narrator so this is not strictly their story, but my interpretation of their experiences. I hope that this chapter is the only one in which my voice is dominant, and that as I try to make sense of what happened for the children during their first year at school their voices become more evident.

The study was largely inductive; I began with broad questions, asking the children what they could tell me about reading and learning to read. I have narrowed my focus as patterns have emerged from the data to concentrate on three key themes that have contributed to children's understanding of reading. Responding to the children's voices in this way has meant that it was appropriate to focus on particular areas in the literature as children raise particular issues. As a result, the literature is spread

throughout the thesis rather than being presented as a distinct chapter, and is examined in relation to the children's experiences on their journeys to becoming conventional readers. As is characteristic of many stories, the general picture does not emerge until the final chapter.

The children's stories are presented in six chapters, as follows.

Chapter Two outlines the methodology used in this study. The methodology was based on that used by Professor Graham Nuthall in the Project on Learning (1997-2004), so the key features of Nuthall's methodology used in my study are identified. The design of the study evolved over time, so the research design is presented chronologically.

Chapter Three introduces the two children who are the central figures in this research and provides the opportunity to share what they told me about reading. In addition, it introduces the three key themes that emerged during the study, provides an overview of reading instruction in New Zealand schools, and describes the framework used to analyse the key themes.

Chapter Four introduces the classroom used in this study and discusses the impact of classroom routines on children's descriptions of reading and their participation in reading activities. It focuses on what happened during one of the everyday activities that the teacher (but not the children) identified as reading, using this activity to explore the way the children negotiated their way through everyday classroom life.

Chapter Five is centred on another everyday classroom activity. This activity, reading group, was the single task that both children consistently identified as reading. This chapter provides a microanalysis of events that occurred during this activity, focusing on the time spent reading and the types of responses children made as they read aloud during reading instruction.

Chapter Six draws on data from outside the classroom and considers the impact of schoolwork on children's everyday reading experiences at home. The chapter

discusses how the children's mothers and their teacher described what they hoped for in their interactions with the children and what actually happened during reading interactions.

Chapter Seven summarises the main findings of the study. This chapter draws the recurrent themes from Chapters Four, Five and Six together, so that issues for teachers working with young readers can be discussed in a holistic way. Implications for teachers, especially those in junior classrooms, are considered and areas for further research are introduced.

Chapter Two

SEEKING ANSWERS: EVOLUTION OF A METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the methodology used to explore the ways in which two children define and describe the act of reading. I will begin by outlining the multiple methods of data collection used during the study, and then discuss the ways in which Professor Graham Nuthall's research methodology influenced its design. This is followed by a discussion of the key features of the methodology and how these contributed to the depth of data collected. I also acknowledge the issues that arose during the study and emerged because of the particularities of the methodology.

Selecting a methodology

When considering how to approach this study I recognised the need for a methodology that would permit me to hear individual children's voices and observe their behaviour directly rather than using indirect sources of information, such as parental reporting or measures of academic achievement. I wanted to find out how individual children defined reading and how they described the act of reading, beginning as pre-readers and continuing as emergent or early readers. I was curious to discover whether notions of reading would evolve or change over time or whether they would remain constant as reading skills and knowledge developed. I was also interested in which features of schooling, if any, might contribute to the ways children talked about reading. Features of three approaches to data collection were combined to address these interests. The main approaches used in this study were case study, phenomenology and ethnography. An additional, equally important, feature was the longitudinal nature of data collection.

This study is primarily a case study of a small number of children, looking in depth at their understandings of reading and their experiences in everyday classroom activities. A case study is the study of a single "bounded system" that provides rich accounts of "real people in real situations" (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000, p. 181). One of the

key features of case studies is the emphasis on the integrity of systems (validity) that only becomes evident when systems (or experiences of individuals within particular contexts) are explored in depth (Sturman, 1999). I selected a case study approach to provide the opportunity to work with a small number of children without jeopardising the amount of data gathered. I was aware that the amount of data collected over a reasonably long timeframe would be substantial. The manageability of the wealth of data collected meant that the number of children I would be able to track must necessarily be limited.

Phenomenological approaches to research stress the importance of studying “direct experience taken at face value”, valuing subjective reports, and focusing on the active role of individuals as meaning makers (Cohen et al, 2000, p. 23). An emphasis on what children say about reading suggested that a phenomenological component was essential in the research process, acknowledging that what a child shared about reading events during interviews represented his or her experienced reality. However, I was also acutely aware that giving children a voice meant more than simply accepting what they said. To get a clear picture of why children talk about reading in particular ways and to get a deeper sense of their reading experiences and the ways in which these influence how children talk about reading, it was important to look beyond the spoken word.

Ethnography, like phenomenology, is concerned with everyday life and explores the ways in which people makes sense of everyday activities (Cohen et al, 2000; Tolich & Davidson, 1999). An exploration of what actually happened during reading activities, and how children negotiated their way through the reading environments they encountered provides a more detailed picture of what contributed to their evolving understandings of reading – so that children’s comments could be interpreted in the context of the learning activities they engaged in (Carr, 2000). Therefore, an ethnographic element was central to the methodology.

In New Zealand, formal reading instruction typically begins in New Entrant classrooms so, as an entry point, this seemed to be the most appropriate environment in which to observe young children reading. (*New Entrant* is a term commonly used

to describe children beginning school in New Zealand. While schooling is not compulsory until a child is six years of age, children in New Zealand usually start school at age five.)

Given these considerations, three additional dimensions of the data collection components need to be elucidated. These dimensions are:

- i. Qualitative/quantitative
- ii. Subjective/objective
- iii. Macro/micro levels

The research was qualitative in that it was primarily holistic, inductive and descriptive and attempted to understand experiences from individual children's perspectives (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). Interviews and observations were the basis of data collection. Analysis of the data provided both qualitative and quantitative accounts of events. I anticipated that quantitative accounts of children's experiences would provide an additional level of analysis that would reveal the impact of the range and frequency of particular events on children's interpretation of reading experiences that could not be provided by qualitative analysis alone.

The research design also necessitated a blend of subjective and objective data. While arguing that the subjective nature of children's self-reports was essential in their definitions or descriptions of reading, I was also concerned that this would not provide a complete account of children's understandings, as noted on the previous page. Similarly, I suspected that observations alone would not reveal a complete picture of children's understanding. Using multiple methods of data collection challenges the notion of a subjective-objective dichotomy (Cohen et al., 2000; Tolich & Davidson, 1999) and forces researchers to identify "myths" about teaching and learning as well as exploring the realities of everyday classroom life (Nuthall, 2005, p. 896). The inclusion of both subjective and objective elements of the study contributed to a deeper understanding of children's experiences, acknowledging that there is never a single representation of particular events during shared activities. Multiple methods of data collection permit researchers to interpret and expand on individual children's verbal responses (e.g., in interviews) by exploring how they

participate in events (observations of behaviours). In this thesis, analysis of behaviour in relation to interview responses contextualises individual points of view, revealing how perceptions emerged and how schemas developed and evolved over time.

Using interviews and classroom observations as the two primary methods of data collection allowed an examination of reading and emerging understandings of reading at both a macro level and a micro level. The macro level is essentially information that is public and readily accessible. Many of the children's responses in the classroom occurred on the macro level – for example, answering teachers' questions, handing in completed worksheets and reading aloud. The micro level is much less accessible and includes the more private behaviours children engage in, such as, self-talk, their management of risk, and peer interactions that are not typically visible or audible to teachers or researchers. Access to the micro level data required recording equipment that could ensure complete time-coded records of everything children did and said when they were engaged in reading activities.

In addition, I sought to collect data over an extended period of time. This longitudinal set of data reduced the likelihood of a “snapshot” effect that might misrepresent children's perceptions and understandings, and what counted as a typical experience (Davis, 2006). Classrooms are busy places and it can be difficult for researchers, teachers and students to be aware of more than a fraction of the interactions and discussions occurring at any given time (Nuthall, 2005). Similarly, interviews can proceed at a rapid pace, with a lot of information shared during a relatively brief period of time. I anticipated that it would be difficult to document everything that children shared during interviews and remain focused so that the interview was comprehensive yet flowing. It was important to consider how events might be recorded during both classroom observations and interviews so that the most accurate records possible were maintained.

The influence of Graham Nuthall's research methodology

Taking the complexity of the classroom setting and the data collection methods into account led me to examine Professor Nuthall's research methodology. The basis for my research design came from Professor Nuthall's work on the Project on Learning, which spanned 1997 to 2004. This extensive and innovative series of studies explored the learning experiences of individual children in everyday classroom settings through a microanalysis of running records of classroom activities.

Each study in the Project on Learning focused on the experiences of individual children as they worked through a particular unit being taught in a single classroom. Children completed pre- and post-tests on the topic being studied, and were interviewed once the unit was finished. Throughout the unit the research team recorded everything that individual children did. These records were developed using video- and audio-recordings and running records maintained by trained observers during each lesson, copies of work the children completed during lessons and the children's records of homework and other activities. The studies "provided insights into how children manage their involvement in typical classroom activities and how their learning is affected by them" (Nuthall, 2000b, p. 3).

The key feature of Nuthall's methodology that was critical to the current study was the ability to continuously record classroom activities and events over time, using video- and audio-recordings of individual children's experiences in the context of everyday classroom life. The facility to time-code these recordings meant that activities could be broken down into 15-second blocks for analysis which provided an opportunity to observe private as well as public events, many of which are not usually visible or audible to observers or teachers (Alton-Lee et al., 1999; Nuthall, 2005).

A second critical feature of Nuthall's methodology was the longitudinal nature of data collection, making it possible to examine the ways in which everyday experiences contribute to changes in understandings over time. Recordings over an extended period of time reveal patterns of classroom culture and discourse that may not be evident in single lessons, highlighting the social nature of learning as well as

individual cognitive processes (Alton-Lee, 2006). While seeking a qualitative methodology in which context was an essential consideration, a systematic data collection process was also critical – something more typically associated with quantitative studies. Nuthall's methodology bridges the qualitative-quantitative gap in this sense, exploring changes in understanding through a detailed exploration of learning processes, while looking beyond test performance in isolation (Davis, 2006).

There were two significant differences in the methodology of this study from that used by Professor Nuthall. The first was the timing of interviews. Nuthall and his colleagues interviewed children after a unit of classroom study was finished. Neither the teacher nor the children participating in the Project on Learning were aware of who the selected (research) children were until classroom recordings and observations were complete after each unit studied. In contrast, I wanted to get a sense of the evolving understanding of what reading was about for individual children. I elected to interview them repeatedly throughout the school year, including the period when I was present in the classroom as an observer. The teacher was aware of who had been selected as focus children and each child knew that they were being observed on some but not all, of the occasions I was present in the classroom.

The second significant difference was the frequency that I observed in the classroom. The Project on Learning involved recording and observing entire units of study, ensuring that a complete record of children's exposure to particular concepts in the classroom was maintained. It was impractical to be present for every reading session in this study because reading is a daily activity in most New Zealand New Entrant classrooms.

In an attempt to avoid a snapshot effect while still collecting a manageable amount of data, a timeline was proposed that would allow me to leave the recording equipment in the classroom throughout the second, third and fourth terms of a school year, so that I could observe reading activities on a number of occasions over an extended period of time.

Development of the design for the study

The research design went through a number of iterations as the context and complexity of the design became apparent in light of the realities of the classroom. I will discuss the evolving nature of the design in terms of:

- i. the initial design (the intended study),
- ii. the negotiated design (discussed with the teacher prior to data collection in the classroom), and
- iii. the revised design (which emerged during the early stages of data collection in the classroom).

My intention was to cause minimal disruption to classroom routines and instructional practices. To this end I developed an initial proposal that I negotiated before the study began. I suspected that discussion of the provisional plan would reveal potential disruptions and pitfalls that only a teacher familiar with the particular classroom environment being observed would be aware of. At the same time I was aware that teachers can sometimes feel a little overwhelmed by the research equipment in the initial stages of the data collection process, and experience a degree of anxiety at being on show (Rathgen, 2006). I was concerned about any anxiety associated with the teacher's role in this study, and by providing a clear outline of the study I sought to emphasise that the focus of the study would be the experiences of the selected children, and not the teacher's behaviour.

The initial design

I prepared the following notes before approaching any teachers regarding the study in order to prepare potential participants for the intensive nature of the study.

The proposed study...

I intend to follow the reading experiences of three to five children from the time they enter school and have their first formal reading experiences until a year after they enter the school environment. "Following" includes a) talking with children in semi-structured interviews on a number of occasions during their first year at school, b) observing and recording classroom reading activities repeatedly during the school year, and c) collecting written work completed

during reading activities. To capture the initial impact of schooling on how children speak about reading I intend to begin interviewing children before their first school visits. To get a sense of the everyday classroom I anticipate frequent observations and recordings during reading activities – beginning with pre-entry visits and extending until the end of the school year.

In addition to the notes outlining the study I prepared a time planner that indicated the period of the study and frequency of classroom observations. I anticipated approximately 14 classroom observations for each selected child. Classroom data were to be gathered for each focus child during pre-entry visits, on three occasions during each of his or her first two weeks at school, on one occasion during the third and fourth weeks at school and then monthly until the child had been at school for approximately five months, or until the end of the school year.

School - access and profile

The first teacher I approached through an informal suggestion by a colleague who knew a number of teachers in the city agreed to participate in the study. The teacher shall be known as Miss B throughout this thesis to ensure her anonymity. Miss B was an experienced teacher who had spent a number of years working in New Entrant classrooms and was interested in being part of a classroom-based study.

Following a brief discussion outlining the proposed study Miss B approached the school principal and the board of trustees who consented to the study. The school, which I will refer to as Oakville, is a Decile 9 school with a roll of 250 on the outskirts of a large New Zealand city. (A school's decile rating reflects the socio-economic community from which a school draws its student body. Deciles range from 1 to 10, with 1 having the greatest proportion of students from low socio-economic communities and 10 having the lowest proportion of students from low socio-economic communities.)

Room 1 – Miss B’s classroom

Miss B’s classroom, Room 1, is the classroom in which all New Entrants who attend Oakville School begin their school lives. The class that children enter is typically referred to as the New Entrant class. As children in New Zealand usually begin school on their fifth birthday rather than having a single entrance date, there is a huge fluctuation in numbers in New Entrant classrooms throughout the year. On a number of occasions during the school year the numbers of children in Room 1 swelled beyond what could be comfortably accommodated in the physical space of a single classroom. At this point some of the children are moved from Room 1 to another classroom, Room 2, something that occurred on a number of occasions during the period of classroom data collection. The children selected to move were those who had spent the longest period in Room 1. This decision was not made on the basis of performance or achievement, but simply on date of entry. Children who moved to Room 2 but were not reading at the same level as their classmates returned to Room 1 for reading instruction, to work with peers reading at the same level.

When I first entered Room 1, in April 2004, to familiarise myself with the layout and routines, there were nine children present. At the completion of data collection in the classroom, in October 2004, the class numbered 22, with an additional four children from Room 2 joining the class for reading activities. Increasing numbers of children contributed to an increase in the number, composition and size of reading groups in response to individual differences in progression of reading skills and children moving to Room 2.

The negotiated design

Once approval was given I met with Miss B to discuss the study in detail. This discussion included outlining the equipment required, the proposed timeline of classroom recordings and observations, the frequency of visits, the number of participants and the potential impact on other members of the classroom community. We discussed the importance of maintaining anonymity for both the school and the

individual members of the classroom community through the use of pseudonyms. Children could be easily identified from video-recordings made during classroom observations, so an assurance was given that these recordings would only be viewed by the researcher for the purposes of data analysis and by those individuals providing reliability checks.

Miss B identified the first period of the day (90 minutes) as the time the class focused on literacy tasks, specifically reading activities, including formal reading instruction. Data collection (recordings) was interrupted at Miss B's request on several occasions. These interruptions fell into three broad categories: i) issues of consent - as groups of preschoolers visited on occasion and the families of visiting children had not been informed of the study; ii) inclusion of activities, such as Religious Education, that were not part of the formal reading programme; and iii) atypical events, e.g., interruptions by other staff members, the teacher comforting particularly upset New Entrant children – when the formal reading activities were interrupted briefly.

Together, preschool visits and Religious Education resulted in the period of data collection being reduced from 90 minutes to approximately 60 minutes for 4 of the 19 observation sessions. Preschool visits occurred on two occasions and Religious Education reduced the time spent on reading activities by 30 minutes on two occasions during the recording period. Atypical events occurred infrequently and only resulted in interruptions to recordings when Miss B switched off her microphone or requested that material not directly related to the experiences of the selected children not be included for analysis.

Revised research design

The revised research design was introduced at Miss B's request once classroom observations were underway. The alterations to the negotiated design are discussed in more depth on pages 34 and 35, indicating the stages at which the changes were made during classroom data collection, but I will briefly summarise these changes before discussing the study in depth.

Three key features of the study were changed to ensure that the study could be undertaken while limiting any disruption to Miss B's classroom routine.

- i. The number of participants was limited to the first two children recruited for the study (rather than the originally intended three to five children). This has meant that similarities and differences between the experiences of individual children engaged in particular activities in the classroom context could not be explored. It also meant far fewer classroom observations so that the amount of data collected was significantly reduced.
- ii. The classroom observation period was reduced so that children were observed until their fourteenth week of school. No change was made to the interview timeline with the children, but the interview with Miss B was scheduled to coincide with the end of classroom observations, so this was brought forward. An earlier interview meant that the children had spent less time at school so that Miss B had less information to share about their progress and development.
- iii. The frequency of classroom observations was reduced. This resulted in a less intensive picture of reading development and interactions in the classroom.

Selection of focus children

It is important that I define the way in which the terms *participant* and *focus child* are used in this study at this point because, while the study focuses specifically on the experiences and understandings of two children (the focus children), their families and the broader classroom community also participated in the study in a number of ways.

All members of the classroom community were participants in the study. Video cameras provided visual records of classroom events, so that what children and adults did when in camera range had the potential to become part of the data that were later analysed. All children wore microphones, but only two were live microphones during

any session (that worn by the teacher and that worn by one of the focus children). However, the audio-recordings from individual microphones worn by the teacher and focus children included comments and responses made by other children and their parents sitting nearby. What children, their siblings, parents and teachers said and did during reading activities had the potential to be included in the data collection on a general, or macro, level in relation to the experiences of the focus children.

The focus children for the study were observed more closely in the classroom through the use of focused cameras, live individual microphones and an observation schedule. They participated in interviews outside the classroom as well. This is, in essence, the micro level of the data collection. The experiences, interview responses and copies of completed classroom tasks of the focus children made up the data that were analysed in depth for the purposes of the study.

Date of entry to school was the primary consideration in selecting focus children for this study because of the movement of older students from Room 1 to Room 2 as the year progressed. It was essential that any children selected as focus children remained in Room 1 for the entire observation period from May 2004 to October 2004. Miss B contributed to the selection process, providing a list of 13 potential New Entrants likely to start school between early May and mid-July and who would remain in Room 1 until the end of the school year.

Of the 13 children on Miss B's list, 4 children were highlighted as potential focus children. The four children were some of the first to enter the classroom, and entry dates were spaced so that children did not begin on the same day, reducing the likelihood that I would have to observe more than one child in any given day. The reasons for my reluctance to observe multiple children during a single observation session are outlined on page 33. The spaced entry dates also provided the opportunity to extend the time in the classroom rather than limiting data collection to brief but intensive periods. The selection of focus children was limited to those beginning school close to the middle of the school year so that if any of the children or their families elected to withdraw from the study I would have the opportunity to seek replacement focus children from amongst those children who started school later in the year.

In order to distribute the classroom observations over the school year, I began the study with two focus children. Only one child was observed and recorded during each observation session so that Miss B did not know which child was being observed specifically on most occasions, even though she was aware of which children were selected for the study. On those occasions when only one of the focus children was present in the classroom during observations, Miss B could identify the focus child being recorded. For example, one child began school two weeks earlier than the other, so he was the only focus child present during his pre-entry visits and on some occasions during his first two weeks at school.

Miss B made the initial approach to the two potential focus families to ensure privacy if they chose not to participate. Both families expressed interest in the study and consented to having contact details shared with me. I followed up Miss B's contact with a telephone discussion about the study, including the plan outlined earlier in the chapter and the roles of focus families.

A boy and a girl were selected for the study. The children will be known as Bomber and Briar throughout this thesis. The children chose these pseudonyms when I discussed issues related to anonymity and confidentiality with them. Bomber's sister, Tweetie, selected her pseudonym as well. All other participants in the study have been given pseudonyms to protect their anonymity, but did not select these themselves.

Informed Consent

Before entering the classroom, approval for the study was sought from, and granted by, the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee. Human Ethics approval is included in Appendix 1.

Written and verbal consent was sought from all parents and children in the classroom. Families were provided with an information sheet that outlined the purpose of the study and the role children would play in the study. The information sheets given to participant families, and those for focus families are included as Appendix 2.

On each morning that I was observing I was available before class to discuss the study and frequently spoke with parents and children. As new families entered the classroom during the period of the classroom observations I approached them individually to discuss the project as well as providing written material, consent forms, and a contact telephone number in case parents wished to discuss any aspects of the study at a later date.

During the course of the study one parent negotiated partial consent. While consenting to recording and observing in the classroom, she requested that nothing her son did or said be included in the final report. This partial withdrawal of consent has meant that some components of class discussions and interactions were excluded from the data reported.

Data Collection

A range of techniques was used to collect data for this study, each of which is discussed in depth in the following section of this chapter. Classroom data were collected using video- and audio-recording equipment as well as an observation schedule and copies of children's artifacts (worksheets and reading logs). A series of interviews with each of the focus children was carried out over a 13-month period, during which the children, their mothers and their siblings talked with me about reading. A single interview with the teacher followed the classroom observation period, while Bomber and Briar were still in her class. Interviews were audio-taped.

Classroom data collection

As stated on page 26, the study was conducted from May 2004 to October 2004. I was present in the classroom during 12 of the 19 weeks of term time available during this period.

Placing and testing video and audio-recording equipment

Two miniature video cameras, two video-recorders, a monitor and a time-coder were placed in Room 1 more than a week before the study was due to begin. One of the cameras was positioned to provide a view of the mat area where whole class activities occurred and the other was focused on a block of desks where the focus children would be seated.

The equipment was tested outside regular school hours before the study commenced, with an experienced technician available to provide training, advice and support. During the week leading up to the study I spent some time in the classroom becoming familiar with the classroom environment, the classroom community and the morning routines.

Audio-recording – microphones

While the recording equipment remained in place for the duration of the observation period, the microphones were only used during sessions when I was present. The individual microphones were introduced and the children were provided with the opportunity to familiarise themselves with these objects before the study began but children continued to fiddle with microphones during observation sessions. Initial concerns that fiddling might represent a sense of being monitored was reduced very quickly however, as this appeared to mirror fiddling with hair, shoelaces and similar items. Children often forgot that they were wearing microphones and left the

classroom wearing these when the bell rang for morning break, necessitating a search of the playground at the end of every observation session to retrieve missing equipment. Children from Room 2 noticed me searching the playground for children who had gone to play wearing their microphones, and after only two observation sessions I had a small group of children who approached me each day as I left Room 1. These children would ask whom they could find for me and then run off to track down the missing equipment. This continued throughout the study, and I do not recall a single day where there was not at least one microphone missing.

Recording audio-tracks onto video-recordings

The data recorded on each microphone was “dropped” directly onto the video-tape recordings from two miniature cameras mounted in the classroom. The audio-track from the teacher’s microphone was recorded directly onto the video-tape of events on the mat and the audio-track from the focus child’s microphone was recorded on the video of desk activity. Together, this provided a single synchronised account of data from these two sources. (The audio-tracks were later copied into digital form for ease of transcribing, and for microanalysis of responses as discussed on page 43.)

Trialling and familiarisation of the equipment and coding schedule of observational data

I met with the children in Room 1 during the week before the study commenced to introduce the children to the topic of the study, the equipment and the routines surrounding this, and to provide the opportunity to ask questions and sign their own consent forms. All children were informed about the recording equipment (video and individual microphones) and the fact that I would be present in the classroom during some reading sessions. An individual microphone was available for each child in the classroom to be worn during each observation session. Microphones were individually labelled to ensure that the focus children received the active microphones. One focus child and the teacher wore active microphones during each observation session. All other microphones were inactive, but the children were not

aware that any of the microphones were not recording. All children were advised that they were free to choose whether to wear a microphone or not. If children did not want to be recorded at any point they had the right to switch their microphone off or to remove it. This occurred on two occasions.

Introducing unfamiliar equipment to an environment raises the question of a potential “novelty” effect. When I initially met with the class the recording equipment had been in place for a few days and appeared to have already become an invisible part of the classroom environment. When asked whether there was anything new in their classroom several children identified a number of objects, none of which were related to this study. This may be an advantage of working with New Entrant children rather than older children who are familiar with the classroom environment. The equipment had become simply a part of the classroom environment New Entrant children encountered, rather than something that was added at the time of my arrival.

Classroom observations and recordings

Continuous records of the child wearing the live microphone were made using this equipment, revealing everything that s/he did while in camera range and everything that s/he said throughout the entire recorded session (even when out of camera range). The person teaching the class also wore an active microphone. (Miss B did not teach the class during all observation sessions. A release teacher was present on some occasions, and student teachers on “full control” were present on others. “Full control” refers to the student teacher taking the full role of the teacher for periods while on professional practice.)

Observation schedule – 15-second interval records

The primary purpose of the classroom data was to obtain detailed descriptions of how the focus children participated in reading activities. The recording equipment provided an accurate audio and visual representation of what occurred, although the

visual record was limited to the two areas on which the cameras were focused. I kept an observation schedule recording the behaviour of the focus child wearing the active microphone. The schedule was maintained in 15-second intervals to support and complement the video-recording on each occasion. The observation schedule was critical for completing the visual representation of activities when children moved to areas of the classroom out of camera range.

The observation schedule was coded directly onto prepared observer's sheets, as shown in Tables 1, 2 and 3. Ninety-minute observation sessions were broken into 15-second interval segments, extending from 9.00 a.m. to 10.30 a.m., so that recording could begin without the observer having to attend to time setting beyond an entry point. This permitted me to maintain running records of the focus child's behaviour during each observation. A large digital watch was synchronised with the recording time-coder before each observation and attached to the observation schedule so that written data could be accurately matched with recorded data during the transcribing process and during data analysis. These were trialled and refined in the week prior to the study.

Table 1

Observation Schedule for Bomber for Day 1

Time	Grouping	Place	People present	Task	Notes	Comments
0924.00	Group	Mat	All	Big Book	Smiles Fingers in mouth	Bomber loves Nemo
0924.15	Group	Mat	All	Big Book	Looks at whiteboard	
0924.30	Group	Mat	All	Big Book	Looks at Big Book	
0924.45	Group	Mat	All	Big Book	Looks at Big Book	

Table 2

Observation Schedule for Briar for Day 1

Time	Grouping	Place	People present	Task	Notes	Comments
0945.00	Individual	Free choice area	Briar	Puzzle	Doing puzzle on floor	Bomber and Freddie whispering loudly at computer
0945.15	Individual	Free choice area	Briar	Puzzle	Doing puzzle	
0945.30	Individual	Free choice area	Briar	Puzzle	Doing puzzle	
0945.45	Individual	Free choice area	Briar	Puzzle	Looks at Bomber and Freddie	

Table 3

Observation Schedule for Bomber for Week 6

Time	Grouping	Place	People present	Task	Notes	Comments
0945.00	Individual	Desk	Sydney, Briar, Freddie, Isobel	Worksheet	Tips crayon dish Holds water bottle Talks to Sydney	Altercation?
0945.15	Individual	Desk	Sydney, Briar, Freddie, Isobel	Worksheet	Talks to Sydney	Altercation?
0945.30	Individual	Desk	Sydney, Briar, Freddie, Isobel	Worksheet	Colours with green crayon	
0945.45	Individual	Desk	Sydney, Briar, Freddie, Isobel	Worksheet	Hand to head Stands up Looks at teacher	

One focus child was observed and recorded during each observation for two reasons. The first reason was my relative inexperience with recording classroom observations. Tracking children's behaviours at 15-second intervals requires focus and precision that is difficult to maintain for 90-minute sessions even when focusing on a single child. Professor Nuthall had developed a strategy to deal with the issue, rotating observations around children so that a detailed description of their experiences could still be maintained. Professor Nuthall and I discussed the rotating strategy at length, but during informal trial observation sessions I found it difficult to shift focus from one child to another without being distracted. In addition, I could not shift focus from one child to another at an adequate pace to maintain an accurate running record of events.

The second reason I elected to track a single child during each observation session was the amount of movement about the physical area of the classroom during reading time in Room 1. Children shifted between desks, the mat, the free choice area at the back of the room, and the computer tables at the side of the classroom. Monitoring the movement of one child was not always easy, as my view was often obstructed as children moved about. I suspected that I would spend much of my time trying to find children, rather than observing their behaviours. It would have been difficult to follow children working on different activities in the various areas of the classroom, particularly during the reading group activity. (Although the two focus children remained in the same reading group throughout the study this could not have been predicted at the outset.) The children also moved to free choice activities at different

times, so a lot of movement would have been necessary, and would possibly have drawn attention to which children were being observed. (Both Bomber and Briar knew that I was watching and talking to another child, but neither was aware who else was being studied. Nor did they know whom I was observing on any particular day.)

The final classroom observation timeline

Initially I intended to add two additional focus children to the study as they entered the classroom for the first time for their pre-entry visits. While I had attempted to avoid disrupting the classroom routine, I discovered that this was not entirely possible. As Alton-Lee (2001) notes, it is not possible for a researcher in a classroom to remain a “fly on the wall” (p. 95). While disruption may be minimised, it remains an issue for classroom researchers. As early as in the fourth observation session the realities of the research became evident and Miss B renegotiated the timeline, the frequency of observations and the number of focus children. At that point I had been in the classroom once in each of the two preceding weeks (for Bomber’s pre-entry visits), but during the third week of the study Bomber was beginning school and Briar was making the first of her pre-entry visits so that the negotiated timeline would have meant that I was in the classroom for seven of the nine school days (the tenth was a public holiday) in the third and fourth weeks of the study. Reducing the frequency of observations and the length of time over which observations would occur maintained the integrity of the study while ensuring that the process was not too intrusive for Miss B or her students.

Miss B also requested that the number of focus children be restricted to the original two, with the possibility of an additional focus child being added if either Bomber or Briar withdrew from the study. Miss B’s concerns related to the establishment of routines in a busy classroom and the potential disruption that observations might cause at a time when it was important for children to be settling into school life. The shortened time span was also related to predicted disruptions (e.g., Christmas activities) associated with the end of the school year.

To summarise, the period of classroom observations and recordings had initially been proposed as May to November or December (depending on focus children's entry dates). Following the fourth session, during the third week of classroom observations, the timeline was reduced so that recording ended in October when the second focus child had been at school for 14 weeks. The frequency of observation sessions was also renegotiated at that point. The intention had been to observe and record each focus child during each of their pre-entry visits, on three occasions during each of the first two weeks at school, then weekly for two weeks and then monthly until he or she had been at school for five months. This was reduced, as summarised in Table 4. Finally, the number of focus children was reduced from four to the two children who had started the study.

The revised schedule of recordings is summarised in Table 4. The schedule permitted me to follow each child through their first 16 weeks of formal reading instruction, from their first visit as preschoolers to their fourteenth weeks as New Entrants. This enabled two pre-entry observation sessions for each child and eight New Entrant sessions for Bomber and seven for Briar.

Table 4
Schedule of Classroom Recordings

Week of formal reading instruction	Focus child	
	Bomber	Briar
Pre-entry	11/05/04	01/06/04
	18/05/04	08/06/04
1	31/05/04	14/06/04
	02/06/04	17/06/04
	04/06/04	
2	09/06/04	21/06/04
	11/06/04	24/06/04
6	22/07/04	05/08/04
10	19/08/04	02/09/04
14	16/09/04	14/10/04

Observation schedule

A number of features of each classroom event were noted during my observations.

- i. The particular tasks being completed;
- ii. The position in the classroom (place) that each activity was completed;
- iii. The size and composition of any groupings during reading tasks, so that peers could be clearly identified during interactions with focus children. (The free choice activity area was not within camera range, for example, so that only an audio record was available);
- iv. Notes of the actions of the focus child wearing the live microphone; and
- v. “Comments” within which any peripheral activity, perceptions or asides were recorded which might have impacted on the focus child’s activities.

Notes and comments were separated to avoid projecting observer bias or interpretations onto my coding of behaviours, while acknowledging what might be happening beyond children’s observable actions in isolation. While notes described what the focus child was doing and/or saying, comments were contextualised, briefly outlining what was happening around the focus child that might impact on what s/he was doing or my interpretation of his/her behaviour recorded under *notes*.

Impressions were noted for revisiting when forming questions for interviews or for future reference when reviewing recordings during later analysis of social interactions rather than for direct coding of specific behaviours.

One-minute samples of the observation schedule are provided in Tables 1, 2 and 3 to illustrate each of the categories outlined above and to provide a range of the types of comments.

Coding strategy

The coding used during classroom observation sessions was developed following discussion with Professor Nuthall, and was based on the coding developed for the Project on Learning. (Nuthall, 2001). I then trialled the coding in the classroom in the week before the study began, making minor adjustments in response to the types of

frequently occurring behaviours I observed. Once observations began I found the coding system adequate, requiring only minimal adjustments during the first observation, where two codes had been used for a single behaviour. For example, L/A (looks at) and L/T (looks towards). Coding permitted a detailed and accurate running record comprised of 15-second intervals.

Observer's role

Throughout each observation session in the classroom I took a peripheral observer role. Rather than being an active participant in the classroom this positioned me at the side of any activity the focus children were involved in, completing the observation schedule without engaging children in discussion. As noted earlier, it is not possible to remain a fly on the wall no matter how limited a role a researcher takes. The observation schedule provides evidence of this with frequent reference to children approaching me for assistance with tasks or initiating discussion with me. Children were often free to move about the classroom during reading time and this resulted in brief periods when my view of focus children was obstructed. While such movement did not interrupt audio-tracking there was the potential for incomplete records when children were out of camera range. Children were not in camera range when they were engaged in free choice activities that ranged from periods of 0 - 38 minutes during individual sessions.

Artifacts

I gathered copies of all the worksheets (reading activities) completed by the focus children from May to December 2004, noting which activities were completed on each of the observation dates. I took the copies of worksheets with me when I interviewed the children, so that the children could talk about these activities if they chose to do so. Copies of completed worksheets are included as Appendix 3. I also copied the focus children's The **R**eading at home **E**dAily recor**D** Including **T**ips and awards book (R.E.A.D. I.T., reading logs) (Kluzek & Coldwell, 2001), which provided a full list of the reading books issued to children for their group reading task

during 2004 as well as comments written by both Miss B and the children's parents. A selection of pages from the focus children's R.E.A.D. I.T. reading logs are included as Appendix 4 to illustrate the types of information contained in these books.

Analysis of the classroom data

Data were coded and collated for microanalysis of classroom events. Video- and audio-recordings were transcribed then coded using the same coding as that used for the observation schedule. Transcribing required that data be both synchronised and assembled in a two-step process. To begin, the three types of data collected (video-, audio-recording and observation schedule) were synchronised so that a record of what could be seen and heard and what the observer noted was available for each 15-second interval throughout each of the observation sessions. (As noted on page 36 only two types of data were recorded for free choice activities.) The data were then assembled, applying the codes used on the observation schedule to the audio- and visual recordings to produce 15-second interval accounts of classroom experiences.

Transcribing and coding observational data

Coding and analysis of classroom data occurred in two phases. The first, or immediate, phase brought the three types of classroom data together in a synchronised form using the codes applied to the observation schedule, as noted above. This provided 15-second accounts of what was happening during each observation session. The second phase was introduced on the basis of the first analysis of the data when it became evident that the initial coding was not precise enough to reveal particular types of responses and instructional strategies being used. The coding was refined at this point to permit a more detailed analysis of interactions.

Transcripts were created for each observation session. This process began by creating 15-second files for each session and entering the observation schedule. The intention was to add a full transcript of all recorded data from both audio and video sources. Unfortunately, this proved to be impractical because of time constraints and the sheer bulk of data collected. As my research sought to investigate what the children defined and described as reading, I elected to transcribe the specific activities identified by the

children as reading, rather than those they did not. Bomber and Briar selected only one activity, the reading group, as discussed in the following chapters, so this was the only activity to be transcribed in full.

Two 15-second interval accounts from the reading group activity recorded in one of the transcripts are included in Tables 5 and 6 to illustrate the information recorded during each observation and how this information was brought together to provide a full account of classroom events.

The information appearing in the top line of the account was drawn from the observation schedule and crosschecked against the video-recording. The verbal interaction between teacher and children was taken from the audio- and video-recordings. Interactions on the mat, including the example provided, generally came from the teacher's audio-track during the first phase, while interactions at the focus children's desks were transcribed using the focus child's audio-track. (During the second phase, both the child and teacher's audio-tracks were reviewed and recoded for the reading group activity on the mat.) Bomber and Briar's actions, and any comments were drawn primarily from the observation schedule and checked against video-recordings. In some instances the children's actions were recorded in only one form because either the camera view or that of the researcher was obstructed for brief periods. Information about the letter of the week, the reading group book and reading group members was recorded on the observation schedule and checked against the video-recording.

Table 5

Transcript of a 15-second Interval During a Reading Group for Bomber on 02/06/04 at 09.36.45

Date	Time	I/G	Focus child	Task
02/06/04	09.36.45	Group	Bomber	RG
Teacher: "Out in the Weather". These children are out in the weather. What's the weather doing there? Freddie?				
Freddie: Raining.				
Teacher: How do we know that it's raining?				
Freddie: Because they're walking in the rain.				
Teacher: They are. What are they wearing?				
Freddie: [muffled response]				
Teacher: And				
<i>Bomber: Head back</i>				
<i>LA Freddie</i>				
Letter of the week: J				
Reading group book: Out In the Weather				
Reading group members: Bomber, Freddie, Oscar, James, Maria				

Table 6

Transcript of a 15-second Interval During a Reading Group for Bomber on 02/06/04 at 09.37.00

Date	Time	I/G	Focus child	Task
02/06/04	09.37.00	Group	Bomber	RG
Freddie: A jacket and a hat.				
Teacher: And this is rain clothes. Can you see something coming out of the sky? Bomber?				
Bomber: Clouds.				
Teacher: Yes. What's this coming down here?				
Bomber: Rain.				
Teacher: Lots of rain. Right. So that's				
<i>Bomber: F/W mouth</i>				
<i>LA book</i>				
Letter of the week: J				
Reading group book: Out In the Weather				
Reading group members: Bomber, Freddie, Oscar, James, Maria				

The coding strategy outlined in Table 7 was applied to the observation schedule and transcripts of video-recordings and used in the first phase. The coding and descriptions of the children's behaviours and responses are more numerous than those of the other categories, as what children do and say (and what is said or done to them) are indicators of their learning to read. For example, while there are only three codes for positioning, many types of behaviour were exhibited while children were in each of these positions. I anticipated that such precise coding might be necessary if a description of what children actually did during particular activities was required for further analysis and for triangulation of data.

Table 7
Coding Categories for Data Analysis

Coding categories for data analysis				
Task type	Positioning	Grouping	Behaviour –what children did (their actions) during each activity	
reading group (GR)	desk (D)	individual (I)	LA looks at	...L) to the left
letter of the week (LoW)	mat (M)	small group (G)	LAT looks at the teacher	...R) to the right
reading activity (worksheet)	desk (D)		LU looks up	F/W fiddles with
completion (RA)	free choice area (F/C)		L/Ab looks about	MT moves to
big book (BB)			TT talks to	RF reaches for
poetry (P)			WT whispers to	Sm smiles
			GM says “good morning”	Fr frowns
			LT listens to	✓ correct response
			SU stands up	✗ error response
			SD sits down	N nods
			HU hand up	SH shakes head
			HD hand down	SBT stands by teacher
			HOH hands on head	↔ from – to
			PT points to	CI colours in
			W writes	D draws
			C circles	

Group reading - coding directly from video and audio-recordings

As indicated earlier, only one activity was transcribed in full. While the coding used in Phase 1 revealed the macro levels of common classroom behaviours used during reading groups, a micro examination of events required a more detailed coding system. This was developed in two stages to provide a precise account of the responses children made and the type of reading instruction provided during reading groups.

Coding from video and audio-recordings

Teacher interactions with students during reading groups were recoded to reveal the types of instruction and support provided for students. The teacher's behaviours were coded so that specific types of instructional support could be identified. The codes were developed to focus on the range of prompting techniques used and to make a distinction between praise (e.g., "well done") and more specific feedback (e.g., corrections). These codes were applied to behaviours using the synchronised audio-track from the teacher's microphone along with the visual data provided by the video-recording of the mat area. The teacher's behaviours were not a direct focus of the study, but the coding was necessary so that the children's responses to particular types of assistance could be examined.

Recoded behaviours were classified as follows:

M	management	BL	prompt with beginning letter
P	praise	LS	prompt with letter and sound
F	feedback	W	prompt with a particular word
PT	instruct to point at text	C	prompt with a combination of picture and sound
TPs	teacher models pointing	P	prompt with illustrations (picture)
Pr	asks children to predict	RT	relates to children's experiences
T	instructs to turn the page		

Coding from the focus child's audio-track

Recoding of the audio-track of the focus children was necessary when it became evident that the transcripts did not reveal particular strategies that the focus children used to negotiate their way successfully through reading group tasks. While transcripts provided a record of everything that was said during each 15-second interval, some features of the children's responses were masked. A large number of responses were often made within each 15-second interval, and the subtleties of the timing of responses and forms of prompting were only revealed by a more refined coding system that permitted second-by-second classification of responses.

For example, on Bomber's first day at school he was reading *The Car Races* with the rest of his reading group. The teacher had instructed the children to read a page aloud together. Bomber read the page along with his peers: *We went to the car races*. Using the coding in Phase 1 it appeared that Bomber had responded correctly to each word. When I listened to Bomber's audio-track more closely however, I noted that there was a delay between the other children's responses to the first four words and the responses Bomber made. When the children read the page *It was dark*, it became evident that Bomber had not responded to every word, having missed (or skipped) *It* and responded after a slight delay to the other words on the page.

Responses were recoded according to timing, so that two new codes were added to the original classification of responses. Correct and error response codes were retained.

Four codes were now applied to reading responses:

- ✓ correct response (and in time)
- ✗ error response
- missed response
- d delayed response

Recoding directly from the audio-track revealed important distinctions that provided further information permitting a more accurate classification of error and correct responses made by focus children during both round robin (individual reading) and chorused (reading as a group) components of the reading group activity.

Reliability

As there was a single observer there were limits to the ways in which observer bias could be minimised. It was not possible to rotate observers or to discuss particular events with other researchers following observation sessions. A second person, an experienced teacher familiar with the methodology, independently coded several sections of the recorded data following the development of each coding system; so three reliability checks were made in total. The first reliability check was performed across activities to determine the accuracy of the initial coding system, while the second and third checks were specific to the reading group task.

- The initial coding used during classroom observations was independently coded using video-recordings of sections of 10 of the classroom tasks. Agreement was 96% for the 10 sections coded. When there was disagreement this was discussed until a consensus was reached.
- Following the recoding of teacher instruction, five sections from two video-recordings of reading groups were randomly selected and independently coded. Agreement was 95% for the sections coded. Areas of disagreement were discussed to reach a consensus.
- Following discussion of the coding process in relation to the timing and sequence of children's responses during reading group tasks we independently coded sections of the audio-tracks from 6 of the 19 observations. We reached a prior consensus on the classifications to be used to code all clear responses made by the focus children. Muffled or unclear responses, which were not easily classified, were not included in the final analysis. There was 100% agreement.

The level of reliability reached across each of the three coding systems was satisfactory.

The multiple methods of data collection provided an additional check of classroom data. Video- and audio-recordings were compared with the observation schedule during and following the transcribing process. The comparison of recorded and written data served two main purposes. The first and primary purpose was to determine the degree of accuracy of coding and descriptions of events. The only

consistent error detected was a slight asynchrony (typically only one or two seconds at most) in the two types of recording which was easily corrected. The second purpose of such comparisons was to supplement the record of each observation session, providing a more accurate and complete record than would have been possible with a single form of data collection. A second method for recording of events proved helpful when either my view or that of the camera was obstructed in the classroom, or events occurred out of camera range. Two audio-recordings for each observation session were also helpful as a muffled recording from one microphone was often clear on the recording from the other microphone.

Interviews

I interviewed Miss B at the end of the classroom observation period, and Bomber's kindergarten teachers soon after Bomber started school. A series of interviews were undertaken with the focus children, their mothers and siblings over a period of approximately 13 months. The purpose of the interview with Miss B was to get information about the reading programme in Room 1, and to get some of her impressions about the focus children's reading. Similarly, I interviewed the kindergarten teachers to find out about the reading activities and the general literacy programme they offered. The purpose of the interviews with the focus children and their families was primarily to hear how children defined reading and described the act of reading. My intention was to talk with children on a number of occasions so that, as with the classroom observations, a snapshot effect could be avoided. I also hoped that repeated interviews spread over time would permit me to establish and maintain a degree of trust that would encourage the children to share their understanding of reading openly. Bomber's mother, Nicky, and Briar's mother, Lucy, contributed during the interviews with the children and talked about reading at home as well as school-related reading activities.

In addition to recording interviews on audio-tape, brief field notes were made (using a dictaphone) immediately after each interview. These notes were similar to the comments column on the observation schedule and included my interpretations of particular comments the children, their mothers and siblings had made; events that

had taken place during the interview; and relevant things the children had done and said before or following the interview. I also noted responses that needed to be followed up at later interviews, and additional questions that needed to be asked at a later date.

Interview timeline

My intention was to begin talking to the children about reading before they had their first pre-entry visit to Room 1 and then regularly during their first year at school. The interview timeline extended beyond the classroom observation period, commencing before classroom observations and continuing after observations had ceased.

Adjustments to the original timeline were necessary during the study as all interview dates and times were negotiated with the focus children and their parents. This resulted in some variation between the timing of interviews with the two children. Negotiation of times ensured that the children did not feel that they were missing out on other, more exciting, activities. The final timeline was as follows:

Interview 1: Before pre-entry visits (Bomber only – Briar was unavailable)

Interview 2: After pre-entry visits

Interview 3: During the second half of the first term at school

Interview 4: Late in the second term at school

Interview 5: After summer break

Interview 6: After 12 months at school

Gollop (2000) argues that establishing rapport is not simply about developing and maintaining a relationship, but about genuinely involving children in the research process. During the series of interviews I frequently referred to my interest in reading and talked with the children about the nature of the study, so that I had multiple occasions to assess Bomber and Briar's understanding of what it was to be a focus child in this particular study, our roles and the topic of interest. The level of rapport is reflected in the type of responses children shared during interviews. While the children did talk about topics other than reading during interviews and we frequently had to refocus the discussion, their talk with me before and after interviews covered a broad range of topics that seldom had anything to do with reading. This suggests that

the children were aware of their role as participants during interviews and that they recognised that it was not simply an opportunity to chat with me.

Gollop (2000) also notes, rapport is not static and must be maintained if children are to respond openly during interviews, so this was something that required constant attention. The children's interactions with me indicated that this was successful. Both of them were enthusiastic about being interviewed throughout the study, and at the end of their final interviews they both expressed disappointment that we would not be seeing each other again regularly.

A video-prompted component was included in the final interview with the intention of stimulating discussion about how children perceived their classroom experiences. This strategy had been used with older children in the Project on Learning to promote recall of events and to stimulate discussion of particular aspects of the experiences such as how children were feeling at the time (O'Toole, 2005). Small video clips of the focus child participating in each of the daily reading tasks were played, and I asked what had been happening at the time and what each child found significant about each task. This strategy was not particularly successful as the children focused on features of each video clip that seldom related directly to reading. While this strategy did not evoke the types of responses I had anticipated there was an unexpected benefit. The inclusion of this component confirmed the invisibility of the recording equipment in the classroom during observations and an associated lack of a sense of being monitored as both children expressed surprise at seeing themselves on tape.

Conducting the interview

I decided to interview the children in their respective homes because there was not a suitable space at the school that would not compromise their status with their peers. Interviewing the children at home would also reduce the likelihood that the children would associate our "chats" with the formal school environment and child roles associated with schooling. I suspected that the presence of other family members would further reduce the formality of a one-to-one interview and make it less likely

that the children would position me as a teacher. The children were also more likely to feel more comfortable and in control in their home environments which are more familiar than the formal school environment (Gollop, 2000).

Interviews were conducted in the living rooms of the children's homes, with mothers and siblings (Bomber's older sister, Tweetie, and Briar's younger sister, Madison) present. The video component of the final interviews required a television and video player. There was some movement during interviews, with both the children and their mothers moving in and out of the interview as they chose.

The children were encouraged to call me by my first name during interviews. (In the classroom children were required to call all adults by their family names.) I suspected that the more formal title was likely to contribute to the adult or expert status that I sought to avoid. Such subtle shifts in status are crucial to establishing a rapport that positions children as givers of information (Gollop, 2000). My intention was to strike a balance so that children could be confident in their role as participants, but still interpret this as a serious task beyond a simple chat. This balance was successful to some degree. While the interviews, particularly those with Bomber, were not as relaxed as conversations when the recording equipment was switched off, the children made comments that suggested they did not see me in a formal adult role. Briar, for example, teased her mother and me during some interviews and when I was checking one of her responses I asked whether she would tease Miss B:

- Briar: No.
 MC: Why not?
 Briar: (laughing) Because I'm going to trick you.
 MC: So you can trick me but you don't trick the teachers?
 Briar: No.
 MC: Oh, okay. How come you don't trick the teachers?
 Briar: Because they're the teachers.
 MC: Oh.
 Briar: At school and at kindy.

It should be noted that while Briar did tease her mother and me frequently during interviews, she also made it clear when she was "tricking" and when she was answering questions seriously.

Interviews were undertaken with no set time limits. Before each interview commenced the children were invited to finish the interview whenever they wanted to and on some occasions they elected to end interviews. On other occasions I finished interviews when children appeared tired, discussion shifted to unrelated topics, or children simply wanted to read to me. Interviews typically ran for a period of about 30 to 60 minutes.

Interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of Bomber and Briar and their mothers. The decision to record interviews was made because the length of interviews and the range of topics covered meant that note taking was likely to have been inefficient and unlikely to provide a complete and accurate record of the discussion. With hindsight, an additional unanticipated feature of the interviews meant that recording was essential. During interviews both children made apparently insignificant comments that, at the time, did not appear to be related to reading. On further analysis some of these comments emerged as central to how Bomber and Briar saw themselves as readers. Had interviews not been recorded, this type of indirect data would have been overlooked.

Children were reassured at the time of each interview that their anonymity would be maintained. Neither Bomber nor Briar appeared concerned about anyone else being aware of what they shared during interviews. Initially Bomber's sister, Tweetie, challenged the use of a pseudonym rather than her real name being used in any notes and reporting. She told me that she "didn't care" if people knew what she had said. The children's mothers were both positive about their participation and that of their children, although both expressed doubts that they or their children had shared anything valuable during interviews on a number of occasions.

Interview structure

Interviews were semi structured – broad questions about reading were developed before the initial interviews with the intention that these would be repeated on each occasion that children were interviewed. Questions related to when children read, how they learned to read, and what the act of reading involves. (See Appendix 5 for a list of interview topics.) Rather than running through the list of questions sequentially I elected to follow the children's lead so that each interview was unique and all questions, although revisited, were not necessarily discussed in depth each time.

Some topics introduced in a particular interview have never been revisited and there were, on occasion, long passages transcribed with little direct discussion of reading. This has resulted in gaps in the record of the development of the children's understanding of reading. In attempting to gain an insight into the children's perceptions of reading, however, it was necessary to follow their lead rather than attempt to structure the interview with predetermined questions. It was important to position Bomber and Briar as givers of information rather than as learners, giving them a sense of control and authority.

Examples of "invisible" reading experiences emerged, and my understanding of the children's experiences and how they defined reading were more extensive as a result of approaching interviews this way. For example, Bomber often provided brief responses to questions about reading, but he enjoyed talking about sports. During one conversation about rugby he revealed that he wore the "one and five" shirt – the numbers on shirts had meaning for him, and he could read them at a time when he could not identify all letters in the alphabet.

Coding Interview Data

The complete transcripts of interview data were coded in two ways:

Question (topic) specific – responses to particular questions, e.g., when and where children read

Response type (responses could be double coded)

Prompted responses - when children chose responses from possibilities suggested by the interviewer

e.g., MC: ...Did you look at the picture or did you look at the words?

Briar: Look at the words.

Unprompted responses- when children responded to questions without prompting or additional structuring

e.g., MC: ...What happens if you forget what she tells you to do?

Bomber: Then you can just ask her.

Challenged responses – when one of the children responded to a question and was challenged by another family member about the accuracy of that response

e.g., MC: (asking about letter of the alphabet) ...and do you know what they all look like too?

Briar: Um no.

Lucy: (laughing) You should do.

Confirmed responses – when a family member (often the child's mother) confirmed that a preceding response was correct

e.g., Nicky: ...What do you look at when you read?

Bomber: The words.

Nicky: The words. That's right...

Sections of interviews during which Bomber or Briar read to me were coded separately using the coding system used for group reading, primarily focusing on the types of responses children made when reading.

Issues of Bias

As O'Toole (2005) notes, an interview can never be completely free of interviewer bias. Decisions about the types of questions to ask, the particular classroom events to introduce as video clips and anticipation of the ways in which children will participate in interview situations are all driven by the researcher's own understandings and beliefs.

There was some evidence from the initial interviews that children sought to provide "correct" answers to some questions, and that when offered prompted responses they would choose from those introduced by the interviewer rather than responding independently. The presence of other family members provided the children with the security of having others present, and their contribution to interviews reduced the "spotlight" effect of a one-to-one interview that might also have contributed to children seeking to provide correct rather than genuine responses to questions.

The presence of other family members also provided the opportunity to expand on comments made by the children to get a clearer understanding of reading practices, routines and interests at home. For example, when the children's mothers have appeared surprised by, or disagreed with, responses to my questions we had the opportunity to explore these in more depth.

While the ideas shared by other family members have been a valuable source of information, these ideas may have introduced a degree of bias to the interviews that would not have been evident otherwise. Nicky and Lucy, the children's mothers, prompted the children on occasion and influenced their responses, and siblings sometimes interrupted the flow of discussion. Both mothers, particularly Nicky, encouraged their children to behave well during interviews which increased the formality of the setting and may have influenced how the children chose to respond to questions. Bomber moved about a lot during interviews and Nicky often gently reprimanded him or encouraged him to focus on the interview. The following example illustrates this point:

Nicky:	Oh sit up ... and leave your socks alone.
MC:	Which one's more fun?
Nicky:	Which one's more fun? Reading at school or reading with Daddy?
Bomber:	Reading at school.

Reliability – interviews

Triangulation of data was central in ensuring reliability. Triangulation refers to “the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour” (Cohen et al., 2000, p. 112). The long-term nature of the interview timeline and the multiple sources of data used in this study permitted three types of triangulation: consistency of interview data with classroom observation data (video- and audio-recordings and observation schedule); congruence of data from multiple respondents (focus children, mothers, siblings, teacher); and, to a lesser degree, stability over time.

Interview data were triangulated with classroom observation data and completed activity sheets to confirm children’s self-reporting. This triangulation also permitted further exploration of apparent contradictions between classroom behaviours and self-reports.

Triangulation of responses from multiple participants within single interviews provided multiple perspectives from the focus children, their mothers and their siblings that confirmed or challenged responses made by the focus children. Miss B’s interview responses provided an additional perspective on the focus children and on the reading activities observed in the classroom.

I met with the focus children and their families over a period of 13 months. During this time a total of 11 interviews were carried out, five with Briar and six with Bomber. This extended period of time provided the opportunity to explore the stability of responses over time.

Taylor and Bogdan (1984) have alerted researchers to potential “exaggerations and distortions in informants” stories (p. 98). They suggest cross checks be made to determine the consistency of the focus children’s responses. In this study particular topics were revisited during each interview to provide confirmation that responses were genuine or accurate. This was particularly important when I suspected that a child had made prompted responses rather than answering questions independently.

Similarly, between-interview checks permitted the examination of responses to particular questions on a number of occasions, confirming or challenging statements and revealing changes in the children's responses over time. Briar repeatedly joked with me during interviews, so it was important to determine which responses were not to be taken seriously. The focus children and their mothers frequently discussed bedtime stories during interviews. This was not an activity that I had the opportunity to observe, so it was crucial that the consistency of responses regarding this particular act of reading be cross checked as I had no other form of direct data with which to confirm responses.

Generalisability

The purpose of this study was to explore the understandings of children about a single set of complex behaviours and knowledge in depth. The degree to which the findings of this study can be generalised, in the traditional sense, is extremely limited. While it is now recognised that “the more subjects the better” is not appropriate for ethnographic studies (Nuthall & Alton-Lee, 1994, p. 19) the small sample size and limited opportunities to observe and talk with children mean that the findings cannot be generalised beyond these two children in this particular setting.

Merriam (2002) has argued that the depth or richness of description is the key means by which generalisability is ensured in qualitative research, perhaps reflecting Cohen et al's (2000) suggestion that generalisability in naturalistic and ethnographic research is “interpreted as generalisability to identifiable, specific settings and subjects rather than universally” (p. 138).

This study was not undertaken to understand how all children define reading, but to develop a detailed understanding of how particular children describe reading. The research question therefore justifies the methodology used as the depth and richness of the data gathered contribute to a greater, more generalised, understanding of how Bomber and Briar describe reading than would be possible otherwise.

Instead of focusing on generalising findings it might be more important to consider the ways in which the findings from a small-scale study such as this one might be transferred to similar situations. Many classrooms throughout New Zealand have a similar reading programme to that used in Room 1, employing similar routines, resources and activities. This type of small-scale study exposes a number of hidden variables and agendas that may provide starting points for further investigation in similar settings.

The richness of the data collected through the multiple methods used in this study is better considered in relation to validity rather than generalisability (Cohen et al, 2000). While what children say and what they do may not always appear to be congruent, the complexities of reading experiences are revealed through multiple sources of data. The opportunity to explore both the perceptions and actual experiences of the two children in this study provided a more complete sense of their interpretation of events, something that is seldom available to others in such detail using alternative methodologies.

Summary of methodology

This chapter has outlined the multiple method data collection procedures used in this study. The description and rationale of the various procedures used has elaborated the ways in which each element of data collection has contributed jointly to discovering how two children defined and described the act of reading.

The following chapter discusses the approaches taken to analysing the data and introduces the three key themes that emerged as Bomber and Briar talked about reading. Each of these themes will be discussed further in Chapters Four, Five and Six.

Chapter Three

“...EVERYTHING’S NOT READING”: HEARING THE CHILDREN’S VOICES

This chapter provides the foundation of this thesis. The children’s descriptions of reading reveal the features of their reading experiences that they perceived to be the most important, and provides the opportunity for the reader to hear the children’s voices. It is the starting point for any micro-detailed examination of their reading experiences. The chapter begins with a discussion about the significance of hearing children’s voices, and why they must be heard. This discussion is followed by a summary of the ways each of the children talked about reading, presented in narrative form. I then introduce the three themes I selected as the focus of the thesis, outlining why each theme was chosen and how it contributes to the thesis. The chapter concludes with a general outline of the approach to reading instruction typically used in New Zealand classrooms and a description of the framework that was central to my analysis of the three themes.

The significance of children’s voices

Both the design of the study and the data collection began with a desire to hear what children had to say, so it is appropriate that any analysis of the data also begins with their descriptions of reading. Without the children’s voices it would not be possible to explore their reading experiences from their perspective.

What adults perceived to be happening during reading activities may be quite different from what actually is happening for the children. Michel (1994) has taken this argument a step further. She claims that beginning instruction will often be “counterproductive” (p. xiv) to learning to read unless teachers and researchers listen to children. Learning to read may become more about “circling, underlining and

crossing out” than about “meaning-making” as it was for a number of children in her study (p. 38). This type of mismatch between teachers’ intentions and children’s interpretation of tasks is likely to result in less than optimal learning outcomes for children. Children may perform tasks in appropriate ways, but may misconstrue which features of a task count as reading. When adults have a clear understanding of what children know, or perceive, as well as what they can do then reading instruction will be more effective.

The children talk about reading

I completed five interviews with Briar and six interviews with Bomber over 13 months. The following narratives provide a summary of what each child shared with me during that period. I have not used the children’s exact words, but have provided these summaries of what they said to represent consistent patterns as well as changes that occurred over time. I have removed unnecessary repetitions and filled out fragmentary sentences but I have retained the tone of the children’s actual comments. I have written the narratives in the children’s language because this reflects their ideas more accurately than an academic style of writing could. I have included some responses as direct quotes when these would not have sat comfortably within a more formal sentence structure, or when any adjustment would have diluted their message. Direct quotes are indicated by quotation marks. I have also used parentheses to indicate asides and other remarks made by the children and brackets to explain terms the children used.

Bomber talks about reading

Mum and Dad have read me bedtime stories since I was a baby. I get to choose a couple of library books or some of my own books from my bookcase every night when I go to bed and Dad reads them to me. (Mum reads to Tweetie, my sister, when she goes to bed.) Dad reads most of the words because my library books are too hard for me to read. I really like reading books with lots of words at bedtime. Some of the books we read together are storybooks and some of the others help me to find out

things. I really like books about fire engines or trucks or other vehicles and I like animal books too. Sometimes I get out my puzzles with Dad instead of reading.

I used to go to kindy [kindergarten] when I was little. The teachers read to us at mat time, but they didn't teach us to read. I used to read in a special place called "the cave" with my best friend, Jake. I could already read when I started school, but I couldn't read by myself. (I could read counting books by myself though.) You don't learn to read until you go to school.

When I started school I learned to read when I sat on the mat with Miss B and the other children in my reading group, the elephants. Even though I was in a group I learned to read on my own. I read when it was my turn because Miss B told me to, and I listened to the other children when it was their turn. My reading group had a box of books at the back of the classroom and I could read those when I finished my work. The books got a bit harder when I'd been at school for a while, but the books I read weren't as hard as the ones Oscar read to Miss B. I used to get word cards [the children were given cards with high frequency words written on them to take home] when I started in Room 1 too, and I learned these by practising with them. I used to make lots of sentences with them at home and read them to Mum. Now that I'm in Room 2 I'm in a different reading group and we read harder books. I still read the same, but I can read more words.

When I'm at school I read by looking at the words in the books we are given. Pictures help, but I have to look at the words because they tell me what the book is about. (I use the pictures more often when I'm reading at home.) When I read my school book I do more of the reading than I do at bedtime.

I point to the words when I am reading in my reading group. Pointing is good because it lets you "know what the other person is talking". My teacher helps me when I get stuck on a word. When I was in Room 1 I didn't use the pictures when I got stuck. I used to go back to a word I knew and start again and Miss B would help me. Now that I'm in Room 2 Ms S helps me.

I take the reading group book home to read to Mum and Dad every night. School books are fun because I get to read them at home, but reading at school is more fun because you get to take turns. When I'm reading at home I point to some of the words as I read and we sound out any words I get stuck on. (I don't have to point to all the words like I have to at school.) It's important to get the words right when I'm reading my school book to Mum and Dad. Sometimes other children have scribbled in the books I take home, but I don't do that because you're not supposed to.

Sometimes when we're at school the whole class sits on the mat and we read a big book together. I read by putting my hand up and I know what the words are by saying them out loud. When we read together we listen to the words [the spoken text] and we don't have to look at all the words. Listening is easier. The ending is most important when we read big books – so we know what happened in the story.

Tweetie is in Year 5 now and she doesn't have reading groups, but she can read at her desk. (We don't know why she doesn't have reading any more.) I don't read at my desk. I do my worksheets at my desk after I've done reading. I work by myself and I only talk when I've finished my work. I know how to do my worksheet because the teacher tells me what to do. I do my worksheets when I've done reading – "I don't have to do reading with these...Everything's not reading." After I've finished my worksheet I can go and do something.

I used to like books with lots of words in them that Dad could read to me, but now that I've been at school for a while I like books with lots of pictures and little words that are easy for me to read too. I still can't read the books at home because they're too hard, but I can read some of the words now. I like being able to choose books. I get to choose books from the library, and I can choose which books I want to read at bedtime, but I don't get to choose my school reading books.

I'm not sure why I read at school. I don't find out things from my school books. I read my school books because I need to and because I'm learning to read. I read my other books at home because I choose them. Tweetie says that you read school books because when you're learning to read taking your reading group books home and

reading them again helps you to be a better reader. I read my books at home, but I don't practise reading at school.

Briar talks about reading

I don't have a special time for reading at home, although Mum says that I always have bedtime stories. I often get books out during the day, even during the school holidays when I don't have to read a school book. I've always liked books that I can read myself – even if I didn't know all the words. I like reading when I'm inside and I like reading when I'm outside. I like reading at home more than reading at school because Mum has only got my sister Madison and me, but at school there is a whole group of us. It gets too noisy and we have a lot of interruptions at school; I like it better at home when it's quiet and I don't have to stop all the time.

Reading is about learning the words in books. I learned to make stuff at kindy but I didn't learn to read there. The teachers read to us at kindy, but “they don't learn you how to read”. You go to school to learn to read. I could read before I started school, but I couldn't read lots of stories. I really like animal books. My favourite book is still *Kitten's Adventure*. It has been my favourite book since before I started school. I used to show people the pictures and tell them the story but now I read the words in lots of my books. You can't read a picture or numbers, but pictures help you read. When I was in Miss B's class I used pictures because “what they're doing makes me help”. I can't read hard books, but I try to read them and I can tell the story and show you the pictures. The words in my books at home are harder than my school books but there are a lot more pictures that make it better. The story is the important bit about reading when I read at home, but I have to get the words right at school.

Learning at school is about learning the words and stuff. I practise my reading some of the time. During reading time we do our reading on the mat. I sit on the mat with the other children in my reading group, but I read to the teacher on my own. We take turns to read, although I'm not sure why. I like it when reading groups are small because you get more turns at reading.

In Room 1 you have to point to the words when it's your turn to read in your reading group so you know which word to read, but you don't point at home because the books at home are easier. When it's someone else's turn you point to the words as well but you don't read and you don't really look at the words either. Our school books have words and pictures and they both help me to read "by just looking at the pictures and thinking the words". I read all the words in my school book but I only read the whole book once, when I take it home and read it to Mum.

When I get stuck on my reading at school the teacher writes the letters and words on a whiteboard and asks me what the word starts with, but we don't have a whiteboard at home. I suppose that we could use my blackboard at home instead, but we don't.

When I get stuck at school I sound out words. I sound out words at home too. It's better at home because Mum can help me. The teacher helps some of us at school, but I don't know some of it.

We do our worksheets after reading at school. The teacher tells us what to do and then we do it. When I started school I spelled my name wrong sometimes, because Miss B didn't tell me how to spell it. I always spell it right now though. You don't have to be able to read the words when you do the writing. I sit at my desk to do my worksheets and I work on my own without talking to anyone except to find out what to do. (If you don't work quietly the other children can't read.) When I was in Room 1 I didn't think that we had to read our worksheets, but now that I'm in Room 2 I think we have to read our worksheets sometimes, but it's mostly colouring and writing. The letters are more important than the colouring in, but the colouring in takes most of the time.

We do other activities in class too. When I was in Room 1 Miss B helped us to read rhymes sometimes and we read big books together. We read the big book together so nobody got stuck and we didn't read all the words. We knew the answers to the teacher's questions from the pictures, and we didn't need to look at all the words so we could look around instead. We read big books in Room 2 as well. Sometimes we read when we do maths. (Maths isn't as much fun as reading though, because we always do it during the hottest time of day and it's noisier than reading.) I like reading best though because we get to learn new words.

Now that I'm in Room 2 I don't use the pictures to help me as much as I did in Room 1. The reading group books have more words and it's easy to remember them. When I get stuck now I sound the words out instead. I know the words now, but some of the others don't so Ms S helps them by reading the letters. We have some naughty boys in Room 2 and they sometimes let us down so that the class can't read.

I like being in Room 2 because I don't have to point when I read any more. Pointing helped when I started reading at school, but now that I'm better at reading I only point when I get to hard bits. Sometimes when Ms S is busy we get to have a quick look through the book so that we know what the book says without having to look when we read it.

Reading is easier now that I've done more of it. I read to myself in the library at school; I like silent reading because it's the quietest. The best reading is when you get to have time with Ms S sometimes. Even though there are a lot of people they have to be quiet and you get to read to Ms S on your own.

Telling a story is the most important thing about reading, using the words and not the pictures to tell the story. Now that I've been at school for a while my reading was different because I can read more of the words. It's important to read the words when you're reading at school but you can tell the story at home because you don't have to get all the words right when you're reading longer books.

The selection of themes

The children's accounts of reading and learning to read reveal a lot about their understanding of reading. Although their descriptions were somewhat disjointed they covered a broad range of topics and revealed complex notions of what was important about reading. Bomber and Briar clearly indicated that they learned to read at school, validating the choice of the New Entrant classroom as a data collection site.

The children talked about a range of topics during their interviews, and their narratives reveal important points that they repeatedly discussed or emphasised. I decided to focus on a small number of topics for this thesis to make the analysis process manageable. I eliminated some topics immediately because I did not have adequate data to analyse them in depth e.g., gender issues in the classroom; differences between reading at kindergarten and reading at school; being able to read before starting school; differences between Rooms 1 and 2; and what becoming a better reader involves.

Other topics could not be explored accurately using the methodology of this study, so these were not selected. For example, the children's frequent reference to using pictures or using words to read was difficult to track accurately, even with the close monitoring possible with video cameras and classroom observations. Family literacy activities were not observed, so children's favourite activities and books, reading interactions with parents, and bedtime rituals could not be examined in depth.

Having eliminated a number of topics for further examination, the following list remained:

- School routines – general and reading-related
- Reading activities at school
- What counts as reading at school
- Strategies children use when they read e.g., pointing
- The importance of turn-taking
- The role of the teacher
- Differences between reading at home and reading at school
- The significance of choice

The topics listed clustered together into three themes. The children's discussion of classroom activities, and their emphasis on what counted as reading at school revealed the significance of classroom routines. The focus on what counts as reading, the strategies children use when they read, turn taking, and the role of the teacher all related to group reading, the one classroom activity both children consistently identified as reading. The differences between reading at home and reading at school

were also discussed in a number of ways that appeared to influence children's reading choices as well as what they did when reading.

The three themes

While the three themes were selected individually, there was a sense in which all three were tightly connected. The classroom routine and reading at home were both directly related to the reading group activity from the children's perspective. The reading group activity was the only part of the classroom routine the children believed was centred on learning to read. The reading group activity was the one school task that became part of the children's home reading experiences as well, with them taking a reading book home to read to their parents each day.

Classroom routines

The children talked about classroom routines in a number of ways during their interviews. They talked about sequences of events and what they did during different types of activities when they talked about what counted as reading. All of the activities I observed in the classroom were designed to teach the children reading skills and knowledge, but the children believed that they only learned to read in their reading group. It was important to examine the routine so that I could see what the children were missing that led to them isolating a single event, and to find out whether the children were actually developing reading skills as they participated in the classroom routine. The classroom data permitted me to look more closely at what the children did during the regular reading activities in Room 1 so that I could determine the ways in which the classroom routine contributed to them deciding what counted as reading and what did not.

Reading groups

This was the single classroom activity that the children consistently identified as reading. My research questions focused on how the children defined reading, so it was important that I look more closely at the particular classroom activity they perceived to be reading. The children had talked about the reading strategies they used and the teacher's role during the reading group activity, providing me with their perception of what they were doing when they were learning to read and what was important about reading group. The children's comments suggested that there was an emphasis on phonics instruction during their reading group, yet reading instruction in New Zealand is usually associated with a whole language approach. Analysis of the classroom data was essential to see what the children actually did when they were in their reading groups and to explore the range of reading skills they were actually practising.

Home-school connections

Both children had lots of reading experiences at home before starting school, and were able to identify a number of differences between the ways they read in each setting. After starting school, the children brought their reading group books home each night to read to their parents. The children and their mothers frequently discussed this homework task during interviews, and a home-school reading log provided further information about how this task had impacted on reading at home. Miss B and the children's mothers also shared their views of the role of homework. These comments provided additional insights into the ways in which school influenced reading at home.

Putting events in context - frameworks for discussion of the three themes

One final piece of "scene setting" is necessary before I can discuss the findings of this study. The observational data used in this study was collected in a classroom, and much of the data collected outside the classroom was either directly or indirectly related to the children's experiences at school. It is important to provide some

background information about the educational context in which the data was gathered, and to introduce the framework I used when analysing the data.

Whole language and phonics – reading instruction in New Zealand

The Ready to Read programme used in New Zealand schools was introduced in 1962 (and updated in the 1980s) with the intention of placing reading instruction within real reading experiences. The programme was designed to promote reading for meaning and for pleasure, incorporating the use of illustrations to assist with decoding and meaning making (McNaughton, Phillips, & McDonald, 2000).

The term “whole language” is commonly associated with literacy instruction in New Zealand, although researchers have also described the teaching method as a balanced approach (Cowen, 2003) or a “pragmatic” form of whole language (Nicholson, 2000, p. 104). There is a clear focus on meaning as central to literacy activities and firm connections between reading and writing are emphasised during instruction (Ministry of Education, 1996).

Weaver (1990, p. 6) outlines the key features of a whole language philosophy.

- Learning to read occurs naturally, with little direct instruction and encouragement rather than correction.
- Learning, rather than teaching, is the focus of instruction, along with an underlying belief that all children can and will learn to read.
- Children will engage in authentic reading and writing tasks on a daily basis.
- Reading and writing are integrated with other features of the school curriculum.
- Children both learn to read and read to learn from the outset of instruction.

Weaver (1990) stresses that whole language is not a specific approach to reading instruction, but an underlying philosophy. The guidelines provided for teachers discuss intention and beliefs, but are not prescriptive. Researchers have struggled to find a clear definition of the whole language approach (Jeynes & Littell, 2000; Pressley, 2002). The difficulty in defining whole language has been criticized by

some researchers on the one hand, because it leaves so much to individual interpretation (e.g., Bergeron, 1990, cited in Pressley, 2002; Liberman & Liberman, 1990), making it difficult to research effects of whole language instruction. There is also the potential that the different understandings teachers bring to a whole language classroom may result in quite different types of instruction. Other researchers have applauded the notion of broad principles that support the whole language approach, precisely because of the degree of flexibility and lack of prescriptive instruction (e.g., Goodman, 2005; Weaver, 1990).

This debate suggests that a high degree of teacher autonomy, such as that seen in New Zealand classrooms (Nicholson, 2000), is required in whole language classrooms. This provides the opportunity for teachers to become “thoughtfully eclectic”, drawing on a range of theories and philosophies, rather than being limited to a single set of strategies and principles (Duffy & Hoffman, 1999, p. 11). Autonomy is also essential because the whole language teacher’s role is not limited to providing instruction so that children become skilled at decoding or comprehending text. Their brief is more complex and long term in nature, as there is an emphasis on preparing children as skilled communicators who can participate confidently and effectively in the community (Ministry of Education, 1993). Teachers in New Zealand are also charged with promoting positive attitudes and self-efficacy. The teacher’s role in reading instruction is to “provide all students with the opportunities and support they need to develop as keen, confident, and competent readers” (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 11).

The notion of emergent literacy is central to the New Zealand approach to reading instruction, with reading viewed as a lifelong and ongoing process rather than one which a child comes to when they start school (McNaughton, 1995; Pearson, 1993). Attempts to read in pre-conventional ways are not defined as examples of pre-reading or classified as separate from conventional reading. Pre-conventional reading, or pseudo-reading, is classified as part of the first stage of reading development. Nor is fluency viewed as an end point, as readers continue to develop skills and more sophisticated approaches to engaging with text throughout their lives, well beyond the point at which responses are fluent. Pearson (1993) has also noted that reading is not

limited to interactions with print. He emphasises the range of texts from which children can make meaning including pictures, icons, scribbles and gestures.

The development of emergent literacy is typically discussed in a broad three-stage sequence (Ministry of Education, 1994, 1996).

- Emergent: Readers are “beginning to make use of semantic, syntactic, visual and grapho-phonetic cues to gain meaning.”
- Early: Readers become more confident with the multiple cues used to make meaning, to the point where they are “integrating reading processes with ease.”
- Fluent: Readers are “beginning to adapt reading processes and strategies for different purposes.”

(Ministry of Education, 1994, p. 34).

Hoffman and Duffy (2001) suggest an additional stage be added, which they have labelled “flexibility” (p. 34). This is the stage when readers move from being classified as beginning readers and can use texts more effectively for different purposes in different situations.

Clay (1998) argues that individual differences in children’s learning and achievement occur because each child follows a different path. They have different experiences and understandings, and different learning histories that contribute to what they know and how they participate in classroom activities. One of the underlying beliefs associated with reading instruction in New Zealand is that, while children’s paths and rates of progress may differ (Clay, 1998; Ministry of Education, 2003), all children can become strategic, confident and competent readers and communicators.

Individual paths are acknowledged but teachers are provided with guidelines of achievement objectives and approximate schooling levels at which these are expected to emerge (e.g., Ministry of Education, 1994, 2003).

Reading instruction is generally based on the child’s year of schooling. In the junior school, Pinsent (2002) identified two groups – the New Entrant reader and the junior reader. Teachers working with New Entrant children focus on the organization of text

and the development of phonological awareness and letter and word recognition. Programmes typically include activities such as shared reading, reading to parents and listening to stories. Teacher working with junior readers focus on developing a sight vocabulary of 15 – 30 words and a range of strategies for decoding and comprehension. Instruction includes shared reading, listening to stories and one-to-one reading.

Pinsent's description of patterns of instruction reveal the way in which reading instruction in New Zealand might be better referred to as balanced or pragmatic rather than whole language, as the term applies in North America. There is a clear emphasis on the deliberate teaching of decoding skills, particularly when working with younger readers. This emphasis is reflected in the title of Nicholson and Lam's (1998) article, *Whole-Language teachers and phonics: Not "Do they?" but "How much is enough?"* in which they questioned teachers about how and when they taught phonics. While there was a variation in how teachers approached phonics instruction, and some question as to the effectiveness of the strategies used, it was clear that whole language teachers did teach phonics. Nicholson and Lam also noted an increasing discussion of phonics instruction provided in Ministry of Education documents. This is not necessarily a clear distinction in approach. After all, Weaver (1990) has emphasised that the notion that whole language teachers do not teach phonics is a myth. She argues that teachers both teach phonics and engage in direct teaching, but that these events occur within the context of authentic activities rather than occurring as discrete episodes. The nature of the activities in which phonics instruction is provided is significant.

Nicholson (2000) has noted key differences between New Zealand's approach to whole language and that in North America. While reading for meaning is central to the child-centred approach used and children are encouraged to use multiple cues when they are unable to read a word, phonics instruction and other strategies that can improve cueing systems can be taught discretely within the standard programme. Nicholson identifies New Zealand research (e.g., Tunmer & Chapman, 1999; Tunmer, Chapman, Ryan, & Prochnow, 1998) that indicates that a phonics focus embedded within the traditional New Zealand approach to reading can be integrated successfully

to promote more positive outcomes for young readers. So, while the New Zealand approach is driven by a whole language philosophy, it also acknowledges the need for balance to meet the needs of diverse readers.

The three worlds of children

Having provided a sense of the type of instruction provided at a broad level, it is important to focus more narrowly on the classroom itself, and the events that actually occur within the reading programme. Types of instruction often reveal intention, but an examination of what children actually do and say during that instruction provides a much more accurate record of their reading experiences.

Nuthall (2005) has argued that research should not simply be about children's voice, but about a "precise, accurate, and replicable account of both the subjective and objective realities of student experience" (p. 926). Having talked with Professor Nuthall about his research, I suspect that his definition is more about drawing people's attention to the incompleteness of what children (and adults) articulate, rather than about children's voice being an inadequate source of information. As a result, my interpretation of voice differs from that quoted above. I believe that voice has multiple components and is as much about what people do as it is about what they say. From this viewpoint, actions both shape, and are shaped by, the way we think and talk about things. Rather than separating voice from observation I believe that voice is best represented by an integration of data provided through observations (actions), and interview responses (self-report and multiple perspectives). This underlying belief led me to investigate the children's classroom experiences in terms of Nuthall's revelation of "three worlds" (Nuthall, 2002).

Researchers have, for some time, acknowledged that there are both public and private discourses operating simultaneously in classrooms that impact on what children learn at school (e.g., Cazden, 1986; Kurth, Anderson, & Palincsar, 2002). Nuthall and his colleagues (Alton-Lee et al., 1999; Nuthall, 2002) have examined these discourses and described three worlds or contexts in which children are simultaneously engaged during classroom activities:

- The public (visible) world – resources, teacher management and activities;
- The semi-private (semi-visible) world – peer relationships and interactions; and
- The private world of individual experiences and minds

Nuthall's (2001a) research has revealed that much of the teacher's attention, and the focus of most classroom research, is concentrated on the public world. The public world includes the formal "culture" of classroom activities and the informal "culture" of students interacting with these activities (p. 13), and will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 4 in relation to the impact of classroom routines. Management and evaluation are two of the central features of the public world, and it is at this level that teachers judge the behaviour of their students (Alton-Lee et al., 1999). It is in the public world, for example, that teachers determine whether children are on-task and engaged with academic content and respond accordingly.

The events that occur in the semi-private world of children are generally hidden from the teacher. Peer relationships (within and beyond the classroom), although not visible, have significant effects on children's participation in activities, their understanding of lesson content and what they actually learn during classroom activities (Alton-Lee et al., 1999; Nuthall, 2001a). Interactions in the semi-private world may be structured to promote learning (e.g., Herrenkohl, Palincsar, DeWater, & Kawasaki, 1999), using the interaction between peers to promote inclusive environments in which research skills are developed. However, the invisibility of peer interactions can also contribute to negative experiences, such as incidents of racism and sexism, and inequalities in status going unnoticed by teachers. On many occasions these events are not reported by children, yet the effects can be devastating in terms of both learning and wellbeing for all those involved (Alton-Lee et al., 1999).

Sometimes the interactions that have the greatest impact can be quite subtle, and simply part of the implicit classroom culture. Nuthall (2004b) illustrated this point by describing the experiences of a child in one of his studies who was regarded as "very limited" by her teacher and her peers. An examination of this child's learning experiences revealed that she learned as much as her peers once the number of

opportunities to engage with content was accounted for. The key difference between the experiences of this child and her classmates was that she had fewer experiences with lesson content. Her peers were often responsible for her limited exposure to content, knocking materials from her desk and assigning her the role of low achiever. Yet despite this exclusion by her peers, the young girl remained “patient and more or less cheerful”, and accepted the role assigned to her. Her experiences remained invisible to the teacher, and her ability was defined by the quality of the work she completed and not her actual experiences.

The private world of children is not directly available, even to researchers, because we cannot get inside the minds of children (Nuthall, 2004a). Children’s self-talk provides some information about how children are working with lesson content, and what they are thinking about, but does not reveal cognitive processes or interpretations of experiences in any reliable sense. Individual children’s prior knowledge and experiences, their beliefs and values, and their emotional states and attitudes will all contribute to their perceptions and processing of information (Nuthall, 2000c, 2001b, 2004a), yet teachers are required to work without the information from this very private and very individual world (Nuthall, 2000a).

These three worlds both shape, and are shaped by, children’s behaviour and what they learn (Nuthall, 2001b). While it is apparent that cognitive, affective and social dimensions of experiences all contribute to what children learn, it is important to acknowledge that the majority of events and experiences that occur during any learning activity are largely unavailable to even the most astute teacher at any given moment. Even trained observers struggle to maintain accurate records of classroom events (Nuthall, 2005), and they are often focusing on a single child and not the 20 – 30 students a teacher is generally trying to track.

Individual differences emerge because of the interactive nature of the three worlds. Children’s learning experiences are unique, even during shared tasks. Therefore, while classroom activities or methods of instruction are frequently discussed at the macro level as a sequence of events that all children experience, the three worlds reveal that a single description of events cannot provide an accurate picture of what is

actually happening for individual children (Nuthall, 2004a). Such descriptions provide a summary of events, but do not reveal what individuals are doing and cannot predict what children will learn or what they are thinking during, or as a result of, events. Without the information provided by close examination (microanalysis) of the semi-private world, and as much of the private world that can be accessed or inferred, researchers and teachers cannot have a sense of what children are learning about content or themselves as learners.

The revelation of the semi-private world raises important questions for researchers focusing on communities of learners. While classrooms may be regarded as communities of learners, and learners and teachers participate in activities together, Nuthall's three worlds challenge the notion of co-construction that results in "communal" learning or shared understandings (Nuthall, 2001a, p. 50). Individual members of the classroom will bring different experiences and prior knowledge to the classroom, they will assign or be assigned different roles, their engagement in tasks will vary and they will learn different things. What is also evident is that children will learn much more than simply lesson content. Children are learning how to manage their environment as they engage with resources and one another.

While the public world of children is available to teachers, many of the secondary indicators of learning actually represent effective management of the environment, rather than providing evidence of learning (Nuthall, 2005). The research undertaken by Walter Doyle and his colleagues (discussed in Doyle, 1983; 2006) has exposed some of the rituals embedded in the interactions between children and teachers that contribute to what children learn in classrooms. Doyle (1983) has focussed on the very public nature of the evaluative climate, and noted how children manipulate their environment to reduce the degree of ambiguity and risk associated with tasks.

Doyle uses Lundgren's (1977) term "piloting" (p. 184) to describe the way in which children get teachers to answer their own questions. It is important to highlight the distinctions between piloting and scaffolding at this point, as these two strategies serve different purposes and have quite different effects on learning. Scaffolding involves more expert learners (e.g., teachers) using techniques to support and guide

children's learning, so that they can complete more difficult tasks than they could manage if working alone (McNaughton, 2002; Wells, 1999). Piloting, in contrast, is used by less expert learners to reduce task demands. Children effectively get teachers to answer their own questions, or define task requirements to such an extent that there is little, if any, room for error. Piloting reduces the cognitive demands of tasks and the need for children to use problem-solving skills, simplifying the task and limiting the risk associated with responding incorrectly.

In a classroom environment children observe their classmates during teacher-student interactions. There can be several ways in which children benefit from this peer observation. Not only are they learning the skill of piloting, but they are also learning what sorts of questions and responses the teacher will accept, and determining the broader evaluative climate of the classroom (Doyle, 1983). Children interacting with teachers are essentially providing models of what is defined as acceptable behaviour in class, so that other children are likely to imitate these behaviours in the future, anticipating that they will be reinforced if they respond in the same manner (Snowman & Biehler, 2006). Children can also receive information by observing peer interactions without directly approaching the teacher themselves.

Research has found that a well-managed classroom is associated with more positive learning outcomes (Snowman & Biehler, 2006). Doyle (2006) maintains that a well-ordered classroom is not simply related to a teacher's skill but requires the co-operation of the children as well. In essence, teachers and children are classroom managers but, although this is associated with learning, as Snowman and Biehler have noted, there may not necessarily be a direct connection between the two. Doyle's (1983, 2006) research reveals that piloting contributes to maintaining patterns that keep lessons running smoothly at the public level, whilst contributing to how children learn at the semi-private and private levels. Piloting may result in a high percentage of correct responses but very little learning.

Children learn how to manage their semi-private world so that they remain well behaved from the teacher's perspective (in the public world), yet can have devastating effects on their peers. Alton-Lee et al. (1999) describe disturbing incidents of racism

that occur beyond the teacher's notice, including an incident where the child being bullied was reprimanded for distracting his bullies. Doyle also illustrates this, using the "typical" example of a student who won a good citizenship award despite being repeatedly "disruptive" in class (2006, p. 113).

Nuthall and Alton-Lee (1994) stress that the social construction of knowledge means that these impacts on learning will not only affect the ways that children see themselves as learners in terms of ability and self efficacy, but will also impact on how they actually process information in the private world. If children disengage they will not learn, and if children are allocated particular roles that prevent them from contributing academically then they will have fewer opportunities to actively process information. In addition, while piloting may lead to a greater number of correct responses, it reduces the likelihood of the development of metacognitive skills required for more advanced learning.

Annemarie Palincsar and her colleagues have investigated the semi-private world of children in some depth, primarily focussing on children's experiences in collaborative groups. This research has revealed the multiple agendas that children have as they engage in classroom activities. These agendas have been divided into two general categories – explicit, or open, agendas and implicit, or hidden, agendas (Kollar, Anderson, & Palincsar, 1994). The explicit agendas focus on the academic task requirements associated with the public world. These agendas have been further divided into two categories: explanation agendas and design agendas. Explanation agendas focus on understanding a task, and include the cognitive processing of content. Design agendas are those required to complete the task, when children organise themselves, from finding pencils and deciding how best to present work, to determining who will complete particular aspects of the task.

The implicit agendas are not directly related to the explicit agenda, but have a major impact on if and how the explicit agendas are achieved (Kollar et al., 1994). Implicit agendas (the hidden agendas that are embedded in the semi-private world of children) involve the ongoing and dynamic issues of roles and identities, when children focus on power and status within the group. These agendas influence who is chosen to

complete aspects of tasks, whose ideas are valued, and whether one has the opportunity to contribute or not. Implicit agendas may be positive events that promote learning, and Palincsar's work focuses on how these might contribute to positive outcomes for children (e.g., Herrenkohl et al., 1999; Palincsar, 1999; Palincsar & Herrenkohl, 1999).

However, close observation of the semi-private world of children has revealed that, on some occasions, implicit agendas have a detrimental effect on learning in a similar manner to the examples from Doyle's and Nuthall's research. While all children may "gain knowledge" during activities (Kollar et al., 1994, p. 28) they may not have engaged equally in the processes required to produce a group product. Their unequal contributions, or their feelings about the experience, may remain invisible. Group products may fail to present an accurate picture of what individual children have learned, so that prerequisite knowledge for more advanced lessons may not have been learned by all group members. For example, children whose ideas are regularly dismissed may be included in design aspects of tasks but not be permitted to make any contribution to content. This can seriously limit children's opportunities to engage with academic material, but not be revealed in a collective project. In a similar manner, individual misconceptions are unlikely to be represented by group products.

What becomes clear from the research described above is that achievement is less about the nature of formal instruction or ability than it is about the complex social interactions within the classroom (Carter & Doyle, 2006; Hoffman & Duffy, 2001). It is difficult to separate the formal from the informal features of learning experiences, or to focus on academic content without acknowledging affective and social aspects of learning experiences. As Carter and Doyle have said, "management, teaching and curriculum often blend together" and "one would be hard pressed to sort out the academic, social, emotional, and behavioural aspects of the discourse" (p. 374).

The recording equipment placed in the classroom for data collection has provided information that permitted me to look beyond the macro level of the public world of teacher instruction and child response, and to examine the nature of children's responses at the more intimate level of the semi-private world.

At the beginning of this chapter I argued that I could not explore the children's classroom experiences without first hearing their voices. I also believe that what the children told me only reflects part of their understanding of reading and what it is to be a reader. Therefore, it is important to examine their comments in relation to what they did during reading activities. Chapters Four and Five focus on what the children did in the classroom during reading activities, while Chapter Six concentrates on reading at home.

Chapter Four

“DO WE HAVE TO COLOUR IT IN?” - CLASSROOM ROUTINES

This chapter discusses the way the classroom reading routine impacted on Bomber and Briar’s descriptions of reading. In the previous chapter the children talked about the classroom activities that made up the reading programme in Room 1 but, as Miss B predicted in her interview with me, they only identified reading activities involving books. Of these two activities, the big book and reading group, only the reading group was consistently identified as reading.

The reading programme was designed to provide children with a range of experiences with literacy skills and knowledge, but the children may have missed out on a number of learning opportunities if, as their interview responses indicated, they only read during the reading group activity. The children may also have missed opportunities to develop metacognitive skills, if they did not see reading as relevant to other literacy tasks in the classroom. In addition, the way the children engaged with classroom activities did not match Miss B’s intended learning outcomes on a number of occasions, even though both children were successfully participating in the classroom routine, and their reading was progressing satisfactorily. The routine must be examined more closely to ascertain why there was a gap between what the children thought the teacher was teaching and the types of learning opportunities she was trying to provide.

This chapter begins with a brief discussion of the term *routine* and the ways in which it is used in the context of this study. This is followed by an outline of the activities that made up the daily classroom reading routine in Room 1, as the children’s descriptions of reading did not reveal the full range of reading-related activities that made up the reading programme.

The children's interpretation of the classroom routine was introduced in the previous chapter, but Miss B's voice has been absent up to this point. Miss B's beliefs about reading and readers have shaped the classroom routines, so it is critical that the reading programme in Room 1 is discussed from her perspective. I present Miss B's views of the key features of the reading activities before discussing these in relation to both the literature and the children's comments about the reading routines.

The next section focuses on the children's actual classroom experiences. Classroom data were used to explore the ways in which classroom routines have influenced children's participation in reading activities. I have chosen to focus on one activity, the worksheet, as the children usually spent the most concentrated period of time working on this task. Despite dedicating large amounts of their classroom reading time to their worksheets, they did not recognise the reading practice embedded in the task so questions arose about what they actually practised as they worked at their desks, and how much of their worksheet time was actually spent reading. This section looks at how the children engaged with materials and resources as well as with one another, and begins to explore the private and public worlds that children simultaneously participate in during classroom activities.

The chapter concludes with questions about the ways in which classroom routines have influenced children's participation in reading activities and what they have learned about reading from their everyday classroom tasks.

Defining routines

The term *routines* can be used in a number of ways, so it is important to explain how it applies in the context of this study. The "typical morning", described below, represents the predictable pattern of morning activities in Room 1 at the time of the study. The routine, in this sense, was made up of the regular daily or weekly reading activities and any associated patterns of behaviour. The reading programme in Room 1 was comprised of a number of tasks including reading groups, big book, letter of the week, worksheet, and free choice activities. The routine behaviours included both formal and informal actions, such as sitting quietly on the mat, taking turns, and sharing resources.

A typical morning in Room 1

The classroom routine described below reflects the New Zealand approach to reading instruction, which is, as noted in Chapter Three, heavily influenced by Marie Clay's notion of emergent literacy (McNaughton, 1995). The combination of whole language and phonics within a range of individual and group activities is typical of descriptions of New Entrant and Junior reading programmes in New Zealand (e.g., Ministry of Education, 2003; Pinsent, 2002).

The routine events are outlined in broad detail to represent the most commonly observed activities during my time in the classroom.

The first activity

The bell rings at 9.00 am, signalling the beginning of the school day. Children gather at the front of the classroom in an area defined as "the mat". The children sit quietly on the floor and talking amongst themselves until the teacher joins them. The children stop talking and turn to face Miss B as she sits on a chair beside a small whiteboard in front of the group.

Miss B signals the beginning of the first activity by greeting the class. A chorus of "Good morning, Miss B" is followed by a settling-in period. Miss B informs the class of any changes to the regular morning programme, welcomes any visitors, acknowledges anyone having a birthday, takes the roll, and shares any school notices with the group. Children are then invited to share news with the class. They raise their hands if they wish to share news and Miss B selects children to join her at the front of the group one at a time.

The remainder of the time up until morning break is spent on reading tasks. When the children are not involved in whole-class tasks, several individual and small-group activities occur simultaneously.

Whole-class reading activities

Two reading tasks are undertaken when the whole class is seated on the mat with Miss B. The first whole-class activity is letter of the week. Each week Miss B selects a particular letter of the alphabet and this becomes the letter of the week. Children bring items to school that begin with the selected letter and place these items on a table at the front of the room. During the letter of the week activity Miss B asks children (either individually or as a group) to identify objects on the table, and has the children chorus the initial letter and its corresponding sound several times. (Miss B introduces additional items that focus on the letter of the week in other activities too e.g., big books and worksheets.)

The second whole class activity is called the big book. Miss B props a large book on the whiteboard in front of the children and uses a pointer to identify the text and key features of the book. Miss B leads a discussion of the story, and then gets the children to chorus sections of the text and asks individuals to read the text, pointing to each word as it is read. A single book is read repeatedly over a period of a week before it is placed in a box at the back of the classroom, where it is available for children to read during their free time.

Individual reading activity – the worksheet

Each reading group is provided with copies of a worksheet – one per group member – at the end of the settling period. Instructions for each group are provided while the class is gathered on the mat, then children complete the worksheets independently at their desks. Towards the end of each morning Miss B calls each reading group to her desk and the children hand in their completed worksheets.

Before proceeding further it is important to define the term worksheet. Miss B and the other teachers used three terms when discussing this task with the children during the observation period – reading activity, activity and worksheet. Miss B always used the term “reading activity” when discussing this task with me. However, the term reading activity may describe each of the routine tasks that made up the reading programme in

Room 1. To avoid any confusion, I shall use the term worksheet when referring to this particular activity.

Small-group reading activity

Reading group is another activity that takes place on the mat. Children bring reading folders from their desks when Miss B calls their group to the mat. (The reading folder contains a copy of the reading book from the previous day, an envelope of high frequency word cards and a reading log that lists all books read to date.) A different book is introduced and read with Miss B each day. The book is taken home at the end of the day to be read with parents or caregivers after school and returned the following day.

Free choice activities

Clusters of Free Choice activities are available to children when they are not required for reading group and have completed the worksheet activity. Individuals and/or small groups of children undertake these activities, generally without any guidance from the teacher. Children self-select items from a range of puzzles and books at the back of the classroom, or play on one of two computers at the side of the room. Children rarely limit themselves to a single puzzle, book, game or computer but engage in a number of activities during free choice time.

The final activity

Children gather on the mat once again at the end of the first period, having put all the puzzles and books away and tidied their desks. Miss B reminds children of the morning tea routine and buddies new children with classmates before sending the children off for their morning break.

Miss B's routine

Having completed the classroom observations for this study I interviewed Miss B about the Room 1 reading programme. That interview is the primary source of the information presented in this section. Comments and events recorded during classroom observations make up the remainder of the data used to represent Miss B's perspective.

Miss B had designed each of the reading activities to provide practice with a range of skills and knowledge. These activities were also developed to keep children busy for the entire reading session. Nuthall (2004b, 2005) has challenged the notion that a busy, active classroom is an indication of learning. He argued that the focus of activities is often about effective management and not about children's learning at all. Miss B acknowledged a degree of overlap between the management and learning components of each activity within her routine, but this was a conscious decision on her part. Free choice and worksheet activities, for example, contained both "busy" and academic elements.

Keeping children busy with worksheets and free choice activities provided practice with reading-related skills (a focus on learning) while ensuring that Miss B had time to provide reading instruction to children in their reading groups with minimal interruptions (an example of effective management). Miss B also wanted children in Room 1 to learn skills beyond academic content as they participated in daily activities, some of which contributed to efficient classroom management. She talked about the importance of developing good work habits such as flexibility and the ability to work independently as well as learning to read, combining generic and curriculum specific skills. If activities were designed without specific learning goals however, then there may not be a clear academic benefit for children or teachers. It is therefore important to make clear distinctions between those aspects of Miss B's routines that directly related to learning and those that were more relevant to management to clarify the different teaching aims (Hill, Comber, Loudon, Rivalland, & Reid, 2002).

Learning goals

Miss B did not directly refer to specific theories guiding her practice during our interview, but provided implicit references to guiding principles when she outlined parts of the reading programme in Room 1. Miss B repeatedly referred to developmentally appropriate practices, to individual rates of progress, to the importance of scaffolding and the significance of contexts of learning. These factors highlighted her belief in the active role of children in their own learning and the teacher's role as facilitator, challenging the notion of simple transmission of knowledge, and suggesting a constructivist approach to teaching and learning (Schunk, 2004; Slavin, 2003). Miss B also talked about the importance of predictable patterns in classroom events and frequently used prompting and modelling strategies more commonly associated with social cognitive theories (Snowman & Biehler, 2006).

Frequent informal monitoring of progress and behaviour was a key feature of Miss B's practice. The teacher's role as observer was critical in accurately assessing individual children's prior knowledge and the reading skills that determined which reading group they were placed in for reading activities. Miss B believed that children progress at different rates, so frequent monitoring was necessary if children were to receive instruction that was neither too difficult nor too easy. She endeavoured to hear every child read every day and marked worksheets daily to ensure that each child was working at an appropriate level and could be moved on to more challenging work as necessary.

Miss B also made some decisions based on underlying developmental principles that were informed by observations and experience rather than notions of reading readiness or specific stages of development. For example, Miss B provided her students with a range of activities during reading time because she believed that it was not appropriate for five year olds to focus on a single skill for extended periods of time. She challenged the notion that reading should be limited to reading a book for the entire session.

Miss B did not explicitly state her position on the whole language - phonics debate. However, she argued that a balanced approach to reading instruction was necessary if children were to become proficient readers. Miss B was not simply looking at reading progression in terms of letter or word recognition. She talked about the importance of formally introducing books and talking around topics, arguing that comprehension was as critical as decoding skills. The reading programme was designed to ensure that readers became fluent, in terms of both rapid letter and word recognition, and the ability to take meaning from texts.

This contrasted with the children's interpretation of Miss B's reading programme. They told me that reading at school was about "sounding out" and reading each word correctly. I had noted deliberate rather than incidental teaching of phonics during observation sessions as well, so I asked Miss B why she placed an emphasis on phonics. Miss B explained that practice with phonics was necessary in the New Entrant class because a number of children (including the two focus children) did not recognise all the letters of the alphabet or the corresponding sounds when they began school, so additional practice was necessary to build up prerequisite knowledge for fluent reading.

The reading activities were frequently connected to one another, providing multiple practice opportunities with particular letters, words, skills or related concepts. For example, the children completed one or two worksheets that related to the letter of the week every week. Miss B also made reference to specific reading group books when she provided worksheet instructions during 13 of the 19 observation sessions (although there were only five references relating to the group Bomber and Briar were in).

Miss B argued that tasks should be enjoyable as well as simply providing learning opportunities. Children were more likely to engage with activities they enjoyed than those they did not, so that this would increase the number of practice opportunities. The classroom routine allowed children to revisit familiar books during free choice and Miss B deliberately planned some connections between activities so that children had multiple opportunities to return to topics or activities that they had enjoyed in the

past. Enjoying reading, rather than finding it a chore, extended to the group reading homework activity, with Miss B expressing a desire that reading with parents should be a positive experience for children.

The reading programme was designed so that several skills were practised within each activity. Some skills were directly related to reading, such as letter and word recognition, but Miss B also incorporated pro-social skills and cognitive skills that were required in the broader classroom context. Free choice puzzles illustrate this blending of skills – for example, jigsaws provided practice with sequencing letters, problem solving, sharing resources, management of space, and following instructions.

Management

Miss B stressed that effective management was essential if teachers were to meet the needs of a large number of children in a single classroom. From Miss B's perspective a well-managed classroom ensured a smooth flow between activities with few interruptions, providing her with the time she required to work with reading groups. Miss B argued that teachers must be "on top of things", so that children who were not working directly with the teacher remained "on-task and busy". Planning activities in advance was therefore a critical feature of effective teaching in Miss B's opinion. A regular routine contributed to children learning to do things for themselves without having to repeatedly ask (or be told) what to do next, and ensured a tidy work environment as well. The ability to follow instructions was central to a smooth-flowing classroom.

Miss B's emphasis on a well-managed reading programme applied to the children's general classroom routine as well. A familiar sequence of events ensured smooth transitions between activities and meant that children had adequate time to perform tasks (and could predict how much time a task would take), as well as providing unstructured free time when they could play.

Finally, Miss B specifically related her emphasis on routine to the children in her class being New Entrants. She felt that predictability was the key to children feeling secure in the unfamiliar school environment.

The ways in which learning and management merge in Room 1

A significant feature of Miss B's reading routine was the variety of activities that children engaged in each day. Miss B believed that children should have the time and opportunity to "read in a variety of ways" without focusing on a single skill or activity for extended periods of time. The programme was designed to ensure that children's progress was monitored daily and they also had the opportunity to engage in self-selected enjoyable reading tasks each day.

Miss B believed it was important that children have a range of activities that were explicitly associated with reading time as well as those embedded in the broader classroom programme (e.g., story writing, maths). As noted in the opening of this chapter, Miss B predicted that children would be more likely to identify particular activities such as reading group and the big book as reading – selecting book-based tasks. While other activities may be less explicit examples of reading however, she pointed out that children "do quite a lot" during reading time, implying that they benefited more from engaging in a number of literacy activities even if the children did not recognise them as reading.

As noted earlier, each activity was designed to encourage children to practise a number of skills simultaneously. Some skills were specifically related to reading while others contributed to learning or to becoming a successful student in a more general sense. For example, Miss B created a card game that was available in the free choice area. The pack of cards was made up of pairs of high frequency words and children could play snap or memory games with these. This card game required children to identify words, and also encouraged turn taking and modelling. When they participated in this type of interaction, children were potentially learning reading skills, cognitive skills, appropriate classroom behaviour and social skills.

Few explicit references to connections between reading and free choice activities were made during reading time. Although Miss B occasionally pointed out connections between activities as she circulated among children in the free choice area there was little public reference to these to the class as a whole. Free choice might be viewed as a strategy to keep children busy, and they often played together during these activities. This busy-ness included additional practice opportunities and self-generated reading interactions.

Miss B's argument was that if children were secure and focused on routine reading tasks then they would engage with the academic content of the lesson and be less likely to disrupt the work of others. Her emphasis on ensuring that children became secure and confident members of the classroom community was significant in terms of learning and management, encouraging children to be independent learners who were aware of classroom rules and routines. Miss B argued that when children had a predictable pattern to their daily lives they were better prepared to focus on the activity itself, rather than worrying about where they should be or what they would have to do next. In this sense, effective management was the key to providing adequate learning experiences.

Miss B also emphasised the importance of monitoring children's reading progress and consequently arranged reading activities so that she had the opportunity to hear every child read every day during the group reading activity. As noted earlier, it was only possible to focus on each group in turn if the children who were not working with her on the mat were on-task and busy, and working independently. By developing a regular routine, children became familiar with the sequence of events, task requirements, Miss B's expectations and what qualified as appropriate classroom behaviour very quickly. As a result there were relatively few interruptions to the group reading activity. This was particularly significant when Miss B was working with a large number of children, as frequent interruptions not only limited the time spent on monitoring children's progress, but also disrupted the flow of events for the children reading with the teacher.

While Miss B argued that setting a clear routine was important, she also felt that a degree of flexibility was necessary. Too rigid a routine would not have prepared children to cope with predictable everyday interruptions. For example, children were usually called to the mat for reading group while they were working on another activity. Children had to be flexible enough to gather their reading group materials and come to the mat quickly without disturbing others and then be able to return to worksheets or games and pick up where they left off. Less predictable interruptions (e.g., fire alarms, visits from preschool children), in contrast, disrupted the flow of the usual classroom programme and Miss B had found that children became distressed during some of these events. She tried to reduce the disruption that could result by preparing children for upcoming events whenever possible.

Miss B talked about management in relation to both the teacher (in terms of a smooth running classroom) and the children (in terms of security and confidence). She acknowledged that there were tensions associated with maintaining a smooth-running classroom while encouraging active learners. For example, children were discouraged from interrupting the teacher working with reading groups, but children who needed advice about worksheet completion often sought this from the teacher. So, in taking an active role in their learning, children sometimes had to break the rules and interrupt the learning activities of others. Bomber and Briar did this several times during the observation period.

The tension between meeting the needs of the individual student and meeting the needs of the class as a whole was also revealed by a comment Miss B made to a parent during one of the observation sessions. As Miss B said, “They’re all quite individual. It’s a shame we have to fit them into a mould to sort of make other things happen, isn’t it?”

Miss B's routines in relation to the literature and the children's understandings

Earlier in the chapter I defined routine as a predictable pattern of activities or events, but it is important to reconsider that definition at this point. Appleton (2003) has stated that routines are not simply sequences of activities. Rather than using the term in relation to specific activities, he argues that it must be used in a broader sense, as it reflects “a way of doing something in a classroom” (p. 293) that incorporates the explicit and implicit rules that guide behaviour. In this sense routines are embedded in all tasks and activities, but also occur independent of them. For example, desk work might be regarded as a routine. Children are expected to work quietly and share resources and focus on the task they are working on whenever they are working at their desks. However, the routine itself is not tagged to a particular activity. This certainly seems to accurately represent the routine in Room 1, as specific rules were embedded within individual activities as well as guiding general classroom behaviour. When watching and listening to recorded data from observation sessions I discovered that rules were such central features of activities that it was difficult, if not impossible, to talk about specific reading activities without discussing the rules and routines associated with them. It was difficult, for example, to talk about the ways of contributing to a discussion during reading groups without considering the rules regarding putting a hand up before responding, turn taking and the requirement that children sit quietly.

The terms management and routine often have negative connotations. In contrast, many rules relating to classroom management in Room 1 (e.g., put your hand up to answer a question instead of calling out, use “inside” voices) were introduced to promote a positive learning environment rather than to restrict or limit children's behaviour. In other words, rules were designed to provide students with a clear understanding of what the teacher's expectations were and to ensure that children participated in activities as well as limiting disruption, all of which are often discussed in relation to effective teaching (Snowman & Biehler, 2006). Equally important were the ways in which rules impacted directly on student interactions. Alton-Lee (2003) has argued that negative interactions impede learning, so rules that

contributed to a caring classroom would promote learning as well as contributing to the smooth running of the classroom.

Miss B's interview responses suggested that she determined the classroom routines, but Appleton (1995) has challenged this notion, claiming that children contribute to routines by repeatedly testing the classroom boundaries. The focus children's responses to "how" and "why" questions during interviews (e.g., "I look at my own work", "Because the teacher tells me to.") suggested that this was not the case. Yet what they said appeared to contradict what I observed in the classroom, suggesting that both claims are valid to some extent. While the children followed some rules without question (e.g., making a *t* sign to go to the toilet), other rules were tested in either an overt manner or more subtle ways that may not have always been evident to the teacher. Freddie, for example, repeatedly broke the rules publicly – calling out during reading group discussions and starting to read before others were ready (for which he was reprimanded). Tina's infractions, in contrast, were less visible and occurred at a distance from the teacher. She hid Bomber's worksheet as he worked at his desk and jostled him repeatedly during one observation session while the teacher worked on the mat.

There were quite subtle challenges when children were in close proximity to the teacher as well. For example, Bomber and Freddie constantly challenged the rule requiring them to sit quietly and pay attention when they were involved in whole class activities on the mat. The two boys often touched one another, played and had whispered conversations when they sat together (which they did during every observation session). They monitored the teacher carefully to avoid getting caught, frequently glancing in her direction. They were occasionally reprimanded, especially when they distracted other children, but many of their interactions were ignored, or unnoticed. While children appeared to be following rules at a public level it appeared that they had also developed strategies to avoid getting caught when they broke them.

It was important to consider the ways in which routines contributed to reading experiences because these routines impacted on how children perceived what it was to "be" a student and how you "did" reading at school. Clay (1985) found that children

focused on routine academic tasks very soon after beginning school. Although Clay's study did not directly focus on the routine aspect of classroom tasks, the security provided by a predictable pattern of events in the classrooms Clay observed may, as Miss B believed, have contributed to the children's level of task engagement. Most New Entrant children in Clay's study were judged to be on-task for more than 90% of the time they were being observed during group activities on the mat and on individual tasks at their desks. Clay's study also revealed that reading progress was evident within the first six months of schooling. Pressley et al., (2001), found similar levels of task engagement in high achieving first grade classes they observed. Reading routines established at this early point in children's school careers were particularly significant because research suggests that these routines contribute to children's reading achievement at the end of their first year at school (Pressley et al., 2001), a key indicator of later school success (Stanovich, 1986; Wylie, 2002).

Miss B argued that it was important that children feel secure in the classroom environment so that they were able to engage in reading tasks. Dockett and Perry (2003) found that children themselves, even before they started school, recognised the importance of being familiar with classroom rules. Children in my study, as in Dockett and Perry's research, became aware of which of their peers broke the rules very early in their school careers. Dockett and Perry acknowledge that this sounds rather negative at first glance, but point out that there is also a positive aspect to classroom rules. Children appear to use these rules to make sense of the classroom environment, in a similar way to adults entering a new workplace, so that they can function efficiently in an unfamiliar environment. Therefore, predictable patterns contribute to more than a simple sense of security. They contribute to making meaning during classroom events as well. Furthermore, if children were focused on tasks rather than trying to work out the classroom routines they were more likely to perform well academically (Pressley, et al., 2001). It follows that children who consistently perform well in a clearly structured environment are also likely to gain an increasing sense of competence that will promote further engagement with reading activities (Anderson, Stevens, Prawat, & Nickerson, 1988).

Early establishment of routines also permitted teachers to focus on content while working with children, without having to constantly revisit where, when and how particular tasks should be carried out (Appleton, 1995). However, it is important to make a clear distinction between being on-task and learning at this point. Miss B referred to the importance of children being on-task and busy, but research indicates that busy work may not be directly related to learning (Nuthall, 2004b, 2005). For example, while Bomber appeared to be busily working at his desk much of what he was doing involved colouring in – something he already knew how to do. Just as effective teachers have multiple goals for instruction (Pressley et al, 2001) children have multiple goals when completing tasks, and appearing busy may be one of these (Doyle, 2006; Nuthall, 2000d). A closer examination of events that occurred during worksheet completion reveals the significance of this later in the chapter.

In addition to multiple learning and management goals, the rules and expectations embedded in routine activities provided children with models that could be applied as they encountered new, or unfamiliar, school experiences or situations (Appleton, 1995). The repertoire of skills and rules developed within the Room 1 classroom routine were likely to provide a range of skills that could be applied to more advanced learning situations, making learners more flexible as they moved through the school system. Flexibility was also related to interruptions and change in classroom routines and activities. Pressley's research (e.g., Bohn, Roehrig & Pressley, 2004; Pressley et al., 2001) indicates that high achieving classrooms incorporate flexibility within efficient routines. Miss B had attempted to do this in two ways, by building in a degree of flexibility within her everyday routine so that children moved easily between activities, but also by explicitly preparing children for less frequent and less familiar interruptions to their routine.

The flexibility associated with predictable interruptions meant that all children in Room 1 engaged in a combination of individual and group activities every day. The activities that Miss B selected ensured that children practised a range of literacy skills daily and that she heard every child read every day. Multiple opportunities to engage with material within each week were required because of the temporal limits of children's working memory. If new concepts are not experienced on at least four

occasions with no more than a two-day period between each exposure then they will not be remembered (Nuthall & Alton-Lee, 1994). Similarly, McWilliams (2006) found that 6- to 7-year old children need approximately five practice responses within a two-day period to acquire spelling responses. In both instances the number of experiences with material *and* the timing of experiences were significant when predicting if something would be learned. Both of these rules applied to all children in the respective studies, regardless of levels of achievement.

Furthermore, the capacity of short-term memory is limited, so that introduction of small amounts of information followed by the opportunity to practise that material is critical. Spaced practice, when there is a rest period between brief practice sessions, has been found to be more effective than massed practice, when material is crammed during intensive practice sessions (Church, 1999). Brief periods of instruction and multiple practice opportunities with new material, such as those Miss B arranged, were more likely to promote learning. Her emphasis on regularly monitoring individual children's progress was also critical in this sense. Pressley et al. (2001) have argued that monitoring ensures that children are being provided with an appropriate level of challenge and accurate feedback. It also provided Miss B with the opportunity to determine whether children were actually getting the amount of practice necessary to remember and use the reading skills and knowledge she was teaching.

The impact of routines must be considered beyond the number of experiences with content and management or organization of the classroom. Carter and Doyle (2006) and Nuthall (1999) have argued that learning is a social process as well as a cognitive process. Therefore, performance and achievement are related to the social environment rather than explicit academic instruction. As the social environment was determined to some degree by classroom routines it is likely that peer monitoring during everyday activities had a further effect on what was learned and valued – defining what was acceptable and what was not, and determining the appropriate role of each member of the classroom community. If routines are to provide an optimal environment for children learning to read it is essential that routines be less about

discipline and compliance, and more about the facilitation of learning (Alton-Lee, 2003).

What became evident during interviews with the children was their familiarity and ease with the routines in Room 1. What was less clear to me was how these had influenced what the children learned about reading. Their descriptions of reading at school were limited to a single activity, yet they engaged with the full range of tasks designed to provide reading practice. This raised a critical question in terms of how the children defined reading – were the children actually practising reading during activities other than group reading (as Miss B intended), or were they practising other skills that were masked by the classroom routines? What were the children actually learning during reading activities?

A second feature of their responses about classroom routines struck me as equally significant. Both children focused very much on the behaviours they performed when talking about activities (e.g., “I point at the words”, “I draw on the piece of paper what the words say”). They made little, if any, reference to the purposes of routine activities or rules, or the ways in which activities contributed to learning to read. If routines and activities were designed to facilitate learning (including metacognitive skills) rather than simply to maintain order, then it was important that children began to think about *why* particular strategies were used for different tasks. Miss B had clear learning intentions embedded in her routines, but interview responses suggested that these might not be evident to the children. I returned to the classroom data to explore these issues.

Examining children’s experiences of routines – the worksheet activity

I returned to the classroom recordings to ascertain how closely the children’s interview responses represented realities of their classroom experiences. I began by looking at which activities the children thought counted as reading. Recordings revealed that three activities were introduced using the word *reading* during classroom observations – reading group, the big book (on four of nine occasions), and

the worksheet (during four of the 19 observations). Only two activities had the word reading in their titles – reading group and the worksheet (or reading activity). These two activities were also the only tasks to be completed by every child during every observation session. I elected to focus on the worksheet activity to explore the impact of routines because, despite the teacher's explicit reference to reading in relation to this activity, the children did not strongly acknowledge it as a reading task. Perhaps differences between the worksheet activity and the children's description of learning to read reveal, in part, why they did not recognise any reading skills that might be needed for worksheet completion.

Surface features of activities were evident in the children's interview responses. What was used and where activities took place seem to have contributed to what counted as reading. The children's definitions of reading activities always included books, but books were rarely required when working on worksheet activities. (Bomber and Briar only used books to complete the worksheet activity during two observation sessions.) The children told me that any reading was done on the mat, but worksheets were completed at the children's desks. The children told me that they learned to read with Miss B, but they had to work on their worksheets independently. Miss B was seldom available to prompt or correct them as she did during reading group. In reading group and other structured activities the words and letters on the whiteboard or in books had to be read aloud, but the children did not have to point or say anything as they worked on their worksheets. The one common feature of the two activities was that both were based on membership of a particular reading group.

It became clear that, from the children's point of view, an activity was not necessarily about reading simply by virtue of occurring during reading time. This contrasted with Michel's (1994) findings, when she found that children often identified activities or behaviours as reading because they occurred during reading instruction. Reading instruction was primarily centred on worksheet activities in some classrooms in Michel's study in her study, and reading had been redefined as a "paper-and-pencil task" (p. 38). Although the children in my study engaged in worksheet activities for extended periods of time, they did not identify this as part of learning to read. The time spent on a particular task did not seem to be the critical factor in their definition

of reading. However, in failing to acknowledge literacy-related skills in other activities the focus children's understandings of what counted as reading appeared to be equally limited.

To determine whether the children's view of reading instruction was indeed a deficit it was important to consider their experiences in more depth. A closer examination of children's experiences during the "non-reading" worksheet task, and an analysis of the ways this activity contributed to what they learned about being a learner and being a reader was necessary to determine how worksheets might impact on what counted as reading.

Completing the worksheet

Worksheet instruction

A typical reading activity began with Miss B introducing each worksheet, identifying which group the worksheet was for, and instructing the children on what was required of them. Samples of worksheets are included as Appendix 3. For 14 of the 19 sessions each reading group was assigned a different worksheet to complete. The whole class completed the same worksheet in the other five sessions. Miss B often checked that children knew which reading group they belonged to before providing instructions on how to complete the task. (Both children were members of the elephants reading group for 13 of the 19 observation sessions.)

Each worksheet was introduced before specific instructions were provided. The whole class completed copies of a single worksheet on five occasions. On each of those five occasions the focus of the task was the letter of the week. Particular letters or familiar texts were briefly recapped before the children were told what they had to do in order to complete related worksheets successfully. Miss B explicitly referred to texts that some of the reading groups had read recently during 12 sessions (although only five of these included reference to the elephants' books), reminding children of the storyline before moving on to talk about the worksheet. If worksheets did not directly

relate to current reading material then a brief discussion of any relevant concepts preceded instructions.

Instructions focused on how to complete the worksheet correctly. There appeared to be a sequence of tasks within each activity, and instructions were usually provided using a step-by-step approach. For example, instructions for the *big* worksheet (included as Appendix 6) were provided in this sequence: Circle all the words that say *big*; write under the story at the bottom; colour the pictures in. The teacher frequently demonstrated each step, or called on children to indicate which words or pictures should be circled. The most common sequence of instructions was:

- i. Write your name
- ii. Write - under words that say .../fill in missing words/a particular letter/a story
- iii. Circle – pictures beginning with a particular letter/words beginning with a particular letter/all the words that are the same as ..., or
Draw – a picture about the story you have written/like the picture in your reading book
- iv. Colour in – the circled items/the picture you have drawn/ the pictures that begin with ...

Classroom recordings of instructions (to all reading groups) revealed that the most frequent instructions were about writing and drawing. Circling was the next most frequent instruction, followed by the direction to colour in. Instructions were also provided about accessing resources (e.g., scissors and glue), models of partially completed worksheets were provided on some occasions, and some time was spent getting children to read words and identify letters and beginning sounds that featured on worksheets. The teacher often read sentences on worksheets and sections of texts aloud, and drew the children's attention to particular features of the worksheets during 18 of the 19 observation sessions, focusing on pictures during 13 sessions and words during 14 sessions. Miss B and the other teachers often referred to reading during the instruction period, but seldom used the word *read*. Instructions to read were more commonly framed up as "Can you tell me what that says?" or "Who can find the words that says...?"

Doing the worksheet

When all groups had been introduced to the task the children were sent to their desks to complete the activity. Miss B spent most of her time on the mat working with reading groups, but occasionally circulated around the children engaged in desk work. There was generally no further teacher-student discussion of the worksheet until the children submitted their worksheets to Miss B at the close of the session, unless individual children approached her with questions.

When the time spent on each worksheet was closely examined, I found that children spent more time watching their peers, glancing at other children's worksheets, looking about and talking, than they did writing, drawing and colouring on their worksheets. There was one exception to this pattern, when Briar completed her worksheet in seven minutes, a shorter period of time than was typical. (The average time spent on this activity was 20.1 minutes). This reveals that, although the children were engaged, or on-task, the periods of time spent working on the reading-related aspects of the task were much briefer than they appeared to be.

The classroom recordings of the children provided the following picture of what typically occurred as children worked on this activity:

Children began the task as soon as they reached their desks. They remained at their desks, unless called to the mat to read, until they had finished the task when they moved to the free choice activities. Children were given no time limit on the worksheet activity, but it was understood that they did not move to the free choice activities until they had finished the worksheet. The children did not appear to rush to finish the task so that they could play with the free choice puzzles and games with their friends. During most observation sessions the focus child worked on the worksheet using a step-by-step approach, usually in the sequence outlined by Miss B. For example, "circle all the words that say big. Write under the story. Colour the pictures in." (See Appendix 6.) When they forgot the sequence they asked other children at the desks what to do next.

Bomber and Briar had told me that they did not talk during worksheet completion, but classroom recordings revealed that although the children worked quietly there was frequent discussion among the children seated at the block of desks with Briar and Bomber. Briar rarely spoke with her peers until Sydney, her best friend from kindergarten, joined the class. Bomber had talked with peers occasionally during his early school days, particularly Freddie, but there was a marked increase in verbal interactions once he had been at school for a few weeks. They talked more during sessions when Sydney sat beside Bomber and Briar (sessions 14 – 18). Sydney talked with both focus children during all observation sessions in which the three children were seated together. The seating arrangement is represented in Figure 1.

Kellie	Briar	Sydney
Freddie	Isobel	Bomber

Figure 1. Seating arrangements for desk work.

Recordings of the conversations that focus children participated in revealed the range of discussion topics typical of their desk mates, few of which included any direct reference to reading.

The types of discussion children were engaged in fell under two broad classifications – task related and non-task related. Task related discussion was much more common than non-task related conversation. Non-task related talk was generally much briefer than task related discussion as well, although there was one exception that is discussed in some depth on pages 106 and 107.

Task related discussion

Task related talk usually focused on the surface features of worksheet activities, and was often organisational rather than being directly connected to content or reading. The two most common topics of discussion involved defining what children had to do to finish worksheets correctly and which crayons or colours were being used. There was frequent disagreement about what constituted correct completion. Session 14 provided an example of the type of disagreement around worksheet completion. The *a* worksheet being discussed is included in Appendix 7. The children had been instructed to write *as* around the worksheet, to circle the words beginning with *a* and to colour in the pictures that started with *a*. The following discussion occurred 20 minutes into the activity. Freddie had finished his worksheet and wanted Bomber to play with him, but Bomber was still working on his worksheet. Freddie stood beside Bomber's desk, waiting for Bomber to finish writing.

Bomber: Just leave it...

Freddie: You've finished.

Bomber: (continuing to write a line of *as*) No.

Freddie: You don't have to do that.

Bomber: You can if you want to.

Freddie moved off alone. Bomber and Briar remained at their desks and continued to work on their worksheets. Seven minutes later they had a brief interaction about how to finish the worksheet. Bomber referred to writing a border of *as*:

Bomber: (running his finger along the edges of the worksheet) Do it that way and that way and that way.

Briar followed his instruction and wrote a border of *as* on her worksheet but Bomber only managed to write a single line of *as* before they were called to the mat for reading group 15 minutes later. Although Bomber had told Briar what to do, he gave no reason for why she should write a border of *as*. This was common practice; the children would tell each other what to do next and what was necessary to complete a task, but either could not, or did not see the need to, explain the purpose of what they were doing or how it was related to reading.

The children's discussions frequently focused on the quality of their work. Not only were children concerned with what they needed to do to produce a correct worksheet, but they commented on each other's worksheets as well, even when children were working on different worksheets. Questions like "Where is your story?" and remarks such as "You forgot something" were common. Comments about how quickly children finished, or how neatly they coloured in were also typical.

Monitoring peers' performance

Children appeared to monitor their peers' progress as well as the quality of the final product, alerting them to errors with comments like "Aren't you doing the wrong colour?" and commenting on the quality of their work. Sydney, in particular, remarked on other students' worksheets during every session that she was present. (Yet she was quick to dismiss other children if they spotted errors in her work.) Bomber and Briar responded to Sydney's corrections in different ways. Bomber usually accepted Sydney's feedback with comments such as "I can't help it. I don't know how to write the big word", while Briar often challenged her and refused to accept her criticism, sometimes in extended arguments:

Briar: I didn't do that.

Sydney: *inaudible*

Briar: No, I don't.

Sydney: You have to.

Briar: You don't.

Sydney: You do.

Briar: No. I want to do this.

Sydney: You're naughty.

Briar: No, I'm not naughty, Sydney.

Disagreements between children were typically just "yes, you do – no, you don't" interactions similar to the example provided above, without reasons for choices being discussed. There was no reference to reading in any of the disagreements recorded; most arguments centred on colouring or writing. The focus was generally on presentation rather than content.

While some monitoring was verbal, much of it was non-verbal and much more subtle. As children worked on the activity they appeared to monitor their own progress and that of their peers, frequently glancing at the worksheets of their nearest neighbours. Recordings revealed that children briefly glanced at each other or peered at worksheets during every session. They often paused in their own work, checked what others were doing before returning to the task, and yet seldom asked one another for assistance. When actively seeking help, which occurred only rarely after the first weeks at school, both Bomber and Briar tended to approach Miss B or other adults in the classroom or ask their best friends what to do, as noted above, despite Miss B's earlier identification of other peers who could provide assistance if needed.

The significance of colour

The other topic of task related discussion that occurred during every observation was which crayons to use (e.g., "Can you do my colour?", "I've got red too.") or whether worksheets could be coloured in. Even on the days when Briar worked silently at her desk, her microphone recorded parts of colour-related conversations around her. A lot of time was spent discussing colours and the sizes of crayons being used. This focus on colour resulted in a lot of time being spent on an aspect of the task that was only minimally related to the reading-related skills that the children were supposed to be practising. The time spent on the reading component was further reduced because discussions often shifted to non-task related discussion about crayons. The following example represents this common shift in focus:

Bomber and Sydney are both colouring in. Bomber has selected a green crayon that he shows to Sydney.

Bomber: Green's too small. These ones are much bigger.

Sydney: Don't tell me.

Bomber: Much bigger.

Sydney: Don't tell me.

This exchange is repeated several times.

Bomber: I'm just telling myself.

Sydney: Don't.

Similarly, there were a set of unwritten rules about access to crayons too, and management issues around these rules often interfered with task completion.

Off-task discussion

While much of the discussion centred on the task there were a number of occasions when the discussion had little relevance to the task at hand and usually involved teasing desk-mates, or playing with each other. These discussions generally involved issues of friendship or keeping things from the teacher.

Maintaining friendships

Maintaining friendships was important to the children. Making friends had been one of the important things about school that both children talked about in their pre-entry interviews, and during their classroom activities they managed their environment to ensure that their best friends saw them in a positive light. Friendships were relatively stable, but constantly renegotiated, and both children repeatedly identified their best friends throughout the interviews. As mentioned earlier, Bomber's best friend was Freddie and Briar's was Sydney. St. George and Cullen (1999) found that friendships are important for New Entrant children for two reasons. Not only are friendships important socially, but they are also a valuable source of classroom information. St. George and Cullen have emphasised the potential use of friendships for peer scaffolding. The children in my study did support one another when they were completing their worksheets, but they appeared to focus on surface features rather than content. This type of support does not represent scaffolding in its true sense. The children in my study benefited from friendships in similar ways to the children in St. George and Cullen's study, but they also reduced the time spent on reading activities and, on occasion, negatively contributed to how children engaged with materials.

Friendships were negotiated in a number of ways throughout the observation period. Children supported statements made by their best friends, they tried to sit next to their best friends for mat activities, and they shared resources and information. As

indicated on Figure 1, both pairs of best friends were seated at the same block of desks for many of the classroom observations. Bomber and Freddie were seated near one another for all observation sessions, although Bomber was absent on observation 19. Briar and Sydney were seated together during observations 14 – 18. Tensions in maintaining status in these paired friendships were evident during the worksheet activity – in whose decisions and evaluations carried more weight, in the value placed on comments and actions, and the tone in which messages were delivered.

Both children frequently left their desks with their best friends when they finished their worksheets and usually played the free choice activities with these friends as well. Bomber and Freddie didn't talk very much as they worked on their worksheets, but Miss B had placed them with a desk between them soon after they began school. (When seated next to one another they talked frequently.) Despite the enforced separation the two boys often moved to be closer to one another, one of them leaning across desks to see what the other was doing, or going to stand by one another as they sorted crayons according to size or colour. Sydney talked to both her neighbours, Bomber and Briar, as they completed their worksheets. Briar resisted Sydney's corrective feedback, but she maintained that Sydney was her best friend and they teased other children by swapping names on at least two occasions. Briar liked to play tricks on the others seated at the block of desks as well; with a smile she would hide a pencil or a ruler from a neighbour, but always returned it as soon as it was missed, or she would talk about pencils, drink bottles and other objects in the vicinity.

Maintaining friendships generally involved only brief exchanges lasting a few seconds. They were frequent events though so took a considerable amount of the time that might otherwise have been spent on completing their worksheets. The example in the following section was a much longer interaction and, although lasting for nearly 20 minutes, it illustrates three typical features of much briefer episodes. First, the children managed their interactions effectively, resolving conflict, and restoring and maintaining their friendship with little assistance from anyone else. Second, despite being upset, the boys kept much of their friendship-focused interaction hidden from the teacher. Third, although the incident impacted on their ability to complete the worksheet, there was little evidence of this in the final product.

Managing what the teacher sees

The children managed what the teacher could see as they completed their worksheets. Just as the children monitored each other's progress with frequent silent glances, they watched what the teacher was doing. They regularly glanced at the mat area where the teacher was working with reading groups, even when not seeking help. There was another element to this monitoring as well, which suggests the importance placed on being seen as a good student. Glances at the mat preceded interactions that were off-task or contravened the class rules, and voices were sometimes lowered during these events.

Patterns of behaviour evident throughout classroom observations that reveal the importance of being seen as a good student, while successfully completing tasks and managing peer relationships, are perhaps best illustrated by a rather extreme example taken from an incident involving Bomber, Freddie, a drink bottle and a pair of scissors. Bomber broke the rules by cutting the straw off Freddie's bottle. Although both boys were upset, Bomber expressed a high level of anxiety at the possibility of being "told on" that revealed how important it was not to be "bad". Throughout this incident they kept the event a secret from the teacher. Freddie did not tell her what Bomber had done, even when she realised something was amiss and approached the boys to find out what the problem was. (Miss B asked me what had happened during the morning break.) While the incident resulted in a period when the boys were no longer friends they re-established their relationship within 10 minutes. Both boys also handed in their worksheets. Bomber's was incomplete and he was allowed to take it home to finish it. Events occurred as follows:

The boys were working on a worksheet activity in two parts – they had to colour in a kangaroo on one sheet of paper, then colour in items beginning with *k* on a separate sheet of paper, cut these pictures out and glue them onto the first sheet of paper. All went well until Bomber got a pair of scissors to start cutting out his pictures. While Freddie was looking away from Bomber and talking to children at the other end of the table Bomber picked up the scissors and snipped the end off the straw poking out of Freddie's drink bottle. Freddie didn't notice. Bomber looked worried, picked up the detached section of straw and showed it to Freddie.

Bomber quietly said, "Please don't tell. I won't do it ever again." and began to cry. Bomber patted Freddie's back as Freddie frowned and Bomber, still crying, repeatedly apologised, once again asking Freddie not to tell on him.

Freddie raised his hand at this point but then lowered it and asked Bomber, "Why did you do it?"

Bomber replied, "I don't know."

Freddie asked, "What did you do?" to which Bomber responded, "Don't know."

Freddie asked, "Did it fall off by itself or did you knock it over?"

Bomber replied, "It didn't fall over."

At this point Miss B approached the boys, aware that something is amiss. The boys, though both clearly upset, did not tell the teacher what had happened. Freddie showed her the cut section of his straw, but only said that it was broken. Miss B talked about the worksheet they were both working on, gave the boys tissues and offered the children the class mascot to cheer them up. She then returned to the mat. Freddie fiddled with his drink bottle before returning to work on his worksheet. For nearly 10 minutes the boys did not speak. Freddie engaged the children at the other end of the block of desks in discussion, but he did not look in Bomber's direction. Bomber returned to work on his worksheet silently during this period. Freddie leaned into Bomber but did not say anything.

Bomber dropped a shape he had cut out, and as he reached under the desk for it Freddie broke the silence asking, "What are you doing under there then?"

Bomber replied, "I fell down and I bumped my head."

At this point the two boys smiled and began to talk to one another. Bomber showed Freddie his drink bottle and explained that if he had a bottle like Bomber's one then there would be no straw to cut. Freddie then showed Bomber how he could still get a drink from his bottle, even with a stubby straw. The two boys then played with the scissors until called to the mat for reading. Neither of the boys had finished their worksheet activity.

Of the 39 minutes Bomber spent working on his worksheet, 19 minutes were taken up dealing with this event.

It would appear that Miss B more commonly saw the product of the children's time on their worksheets than the process, much of which was carefully managed to present the children in the best possible light.

Submitting completed worksheets

The teacher briefly met with each child individually on 15 of the 19 observed sessions and pasted the worksheet into the child's exercise book that was kept on the teacher's desk. The audio-recordings revealed the types of comments teachers made as children handed in their worksheets. Six types of comments were recorded:

- i. Praise (general statements, e.g., well done)
- ii. Children were sent to finish incomplete worksheets
- iii. Children were asked to identify words or pictures beginning with particular letters
- iv. Feedback about particular aspects of the task
- v. Talk about stamps and stickers
- vi. Comments unrelated to the worksheet, or no comment

The focus children were asked to identify words or to select pictures beginning with particular letters and say what they were on 5 of the 15 occasions when they submitted worksheets. However, when the audio-recordings of interactions between the teacher and other children were replayed it became evident that all types of comment were used each day and no clear pattern emerged.

It was difficult to establish whether any patterns of the types of teacher responses and comments existed for two reasons. First, the children usually only spent a few seconds with the teacher and some interaction was non-verbal. There was no video-recording of the teacher's desk area where this exchange occurred, so it was not fully reported. Second, I was observing a single child, so could not accurately report what happened with other children as the focus child stood in line or after they moved off.

Features of rules and routines that influence the ways in which children engage with reading materials

Having shown how children engaged in an individual activity during the regular classroom routine, and having heard how they talked about reading in relation to the routine in general, I want to consider ways in which classroom routines impacted on what children learned about reading during task completion.

Time on-task – a summary

The time spent on the worksheet activity ranged from 7 – 49 minutes, with the average time spent on the activity being 20.1 minutes. It would appear that a significant amount of the reading time available was spent practising reading-related skills. A closer look revealed that this was not an accurate representation of the time engaged in the task at all. In 17 of the 19 observation sessions, the focus child spent less time engaged in writing, drawing and colouring in their worksheets than they spent on other behaviours. On the single occasion that a focus child (Briar) spent more time completing the worksheet she only took seven minutes to complete her worksheet, the shortest period observed during the study.

This suggests that, although the children were busy for reasonably long periods, they were reading for much shorter periods of time. Of the time spent completing the worksheets, the children spent more time colouring than writing and/or drawing during 13 of the observations. It would appear that the final instruction provided by the teacher was the one that the children focused on, and this was the skill that had little to do with reading. This supports Nuthall's (2004b) claim that busy children do not necessarily learn what teachers intend them to. The children's colouring certainly improved during the year, particularly Bomber's, and their questions to the teacher were generally fewer the longer they were at school because they knew what was expected of them. However, they were not necessarily spending a great deal of time practising the more important skills that were central to the worksheet activity. The focus children were doing very little reading and were completing the writing components very quickly. It was not surprising, in light of this, that Briar told me that the worksheets were mostly about colouring and writing. She had also accurately reported that the letters were the most important feature of the worksheets, but that colouring in took the most time. Bomber had not talked about worksheets as specifically, but he had (quite accurately) reported that the worksheets were more about copying than about reading.

The three worlds of children

At this point it is helpful to return to the three worlds of children that were introduced in Chapter Three. These three worlds, particularly the semi-private and private worlds, provided me with information that was used to examine how the children's actions and experiences during activities impacted on the ways they talked about what counted as reading. This analysis has also revealed which reading skills the children were actually practising during the worksheet and what they learned were the important features of the activity.

I will define each of these worlds in terms of the worksheet activity, before discussing them in relation to Bomber and Briar's experiences. The public world was evident during the worksheet instruction and when the children submitted their worksheets – for example, the teacher told the children what to do, and the children made overt responses when asked questions. The semi-private world was evident from the classroom recordings at children's desks – for example, the discussions between peers, and Sydney repeatedly knocking Bomber's arm as he worked on his worksheet. The private world of the two focus children remained largely unavailable during the worksheet activity, although Bomber occasionally engaged in self-talk as he wrote letters that gave some indication of what he was thinking.

The public world appeared to have influenced the children's interactions with reading activities as they had clear understandings of task requirements and teacher expectations. The semi-private world appeared to have a significant impact on the process used to complete activities and what the children personally valued and perceived to be the most significant elements of each task. Yet performance and progress were judged at the public level, so many aspects of the children's understandings remained hidden from the teacher in the semi-private and private worlds.

Following instructions

Doing as the teacher asked, both in terms of the completed worksheet and being seen to be good, represents part of the visible public world of the classroom. The teacher generally only got to see the final product and, based on this worksheet, determined how each child was progressing with his or her reading skills. An examination of the events that occurred during seatwork revealed the processes involved in creating the product, exposing the ways in which the semi-private world and the children's management of their environment contributed enormously to that final product. While a correct final product may have suggested that children have followed instructions correctly, shared an understanding of the purpose of the task itself and used appropriate strategies, this did not always appear to be true. The children may have been busy but it is not clear if they were always focused on the teacher's intended learning outcome. What to do next, or whether or not to colour in seemed to be the most significant feature of the task in most conversations between children. It was not clear whether the children understood the purpose of activities or, if they did, they saw no reason to discuss it.

Miss B acknowledged that the worksheet activity was designed to keep children busy and prevent disruption while she read with other groups on the mat, so to some extent it is understandable that children saw this as a task to *do*, rather than an example of reading. The sheets themselves were tailored to fit with the reading programme specific to Room 1. Miss B planned the sequence of sheets for each group carefully, often creating the worksheets herself, so that they highlighted topics, concepts, words or letters that the children had been working with. This was a task designed to provide practice with letter or word recognition, with writing skills, with following instructions and with developing independence – all skills required by competent readers. Further examination of the purpose of the task in relation to the three worlds (Nuthall, 2005) is necessary.

Instructions were provided in the public world. Several key features must be considered when looking at how these instructions were framed up. Explicit connections were made to reading materials that groups had worked with or other literacy activities before children were told how to complete the task. As outlined

earlier, instructions were provided using a step-by-step approach. Miss B described what children should do (e.g., circling all the words beginning with *a*). Yet the deeper purpose, such as the ways in which letter recognition and sounds contributed to reading and the importance of practice when learning new knowledge and skills, were never explicitly stated. This might explain why the children were familiar with strategies associated with the task, could tell me how to complete the task successfully, but did not, or could not, answer “why” questions. (e.g., Why are beginning sounds important when reading?)

An emphasis on what to do also led to several positive outcomes. Clear and concise instruction combined with repetition within each activity provided the children with a great deal of practice at completing activities successfully and independently. Repetition is critical for learning, and there was a pattern to the instruction that ensured that children became familiar with tasks very quickly. Familiarity with instruction and task requirements allowed the children to develop and consolidate literacy-related strategies, although the children did not recognise these as reading. Regular participation in activities also meant that children became familiar with the classroom routine, which was likely to contribute to a sense of belonging or, more specifically, identification as a member of their reading group.

The worksheet instruction had an impact at the semi-private level too. When children noticed that one of their peers had not followed the teacher’s instructions to complete the worksheet they reminded one another of what the teacher had said they should do. The confidence and regularity with which such reminders were delivered suggested one of two things, either that following instructions ensured success, or there was an expectation that they should all follow the same rules. It was not clear why the children corrected one another and offered unsolicited advice – whether this was to promote success for all members of the classroom community, or whether this was about claiming status (appearing more knowledgeable than others) and maintaining order remains unclear. Either way, there was no evident focus on reading. This may be significant in terms of encouraging children to become strategic readers. Paris, Lipson and Wixson (1994) refer to strategic readers as those readers who use skills in a deliberate manner, having thought out their actions in ways that they can analyse

and justify. The children in this study do not appear to be approaching tasks strategically, but are relying on familiarity with routines and their ability to follow instructions as an accurate guide to completing activities instead.

It is important to consider the implications of non-strategic reading on reading development. Paris et al. (1994) argue that children who read strategically are more likely to become motivated to read more. It follows that children who read more get more practice with skills, something that has been repeatedly acknowledged as essential for improvement (e.g., Stahl & Heubach, 2005). In addition, Paris et al. have found that strategic readers can analyse their use of strategies publicly, so that teachers can monitor their progress. In this sense, the semi-private world of young readers can contribute to the public world in a positive way.

The impact of classroom experiences on the private world of the children was less obvious. The focus children's private worlds were rarely, if ever, available to me. While Bomber frequently made noises, he seldom engaged in self-talk that might have revealed what he was thinking about. He talked himself through writing letters as he completed one worksheet, but made no other articulate comments. Briar did not engage in self-talk during observation sessions, so it was impossible to have any direct indication of what Briar was thinking as she worked at her desk.

Formal and informal elements of activities

While instructions and completion of activities were explicitly outlined and described, there were a number of rules that contributed to the way children approached tasks that were seldom, if ever, mentioned publicly. Many of these rules were related to management and contributed to the smooth running of activities by limiting unnecessary disruptions. Some rules, like the importance of being quiet when not working with the teacher, were only enforced when they were breached. Children learned very quickly to follow these rules, and monitored them independently to some degree. The understanding that resources were to be shared was never verbalised during observations, yet I did not see a single occasion on which resources were

deliberately withheld from others, although there was a certain amount of teasing surrounding access to crayons.

Looking after one another was a common theme in Room 1. If a child was anxious or upset then at least one of his or her classmates would often check whether s/he was all right before Miss B intervened. A buddy system operated for new arrivals, and this seemed to persist after it was no longer an official arrangement. Of equal significance was the way in which negative interactions were managed – in hushed tones, with surreptitious glances in the teacher’s direction to avoid detection, suggesting that children were aware that this was behaviour the teacher neither expected nor approved of. The impact of this type of exchange was not evident in the final products children presented to teachers, so she remained unaware of what was actually learned about life in the classroom or the implications for how tasks were completed.

Although most of these rules had little to do with the actual reading component of any task, the children spent a lot of time getting them right, or avoiding being caught breaking them. Time that could have been spent on reading related tasks instead. The children spent time watching the teacher during each observation session, although glances were sometimes so brief that they did not appear on observations schedules and were only evident when video-recordings were replayed.

Agendas

The frequent reference to interactions that focused on completing worksheets correctly, and those that were more about friendships than content draws attention to the importance of the agendas guiding the children’s behaviours. The broad types of agendas introduced in Chapter Three relate to separate aspects of the worksheet activity, but they impacted on one another. It is important to consider the ways in which these agendas intersected both positively and negatively. The water bottle event described earlier provides an interesting illustration of the multiple agendas operating simultaneously. Bomber’s implicit agenda, attempting to regain Freddie’s friendship, clearly dominated his explicit agenda (finishing his worksheet). While both boys continued to work on their worksheets, they spent much less time on the

task than they would have done had they not been trying to re-establish their friendship. This event illustrated one of the ways in which time spent on implicit agendas disrupted task completion and limited the children's engagement with academic content. It is important to acknowledge that very little of this was evident in the public world. Miss B was aware of a brief disturbance, but the children excluded her and presented a façade of on-task behaviour for all but one or two minutes of the entire incident.

Less extreme everyday incidents also altered the children's explicit agendas, limiting children's interaction with reading-related content. For example, children sometimes focused on getting finished within the time available rather than producing something of quality. On other occasions friendships contributed to positive experiences. Sharing resources and helping one another increased the likelihood of a successful outcome and reduced the amount of time spent searching for crayons and asking for help.

Being a good student provided another example of implicit agendas in Room 1. On one level this had a positive impact on the development of reading skills and knowledge. Many of the strategies children used to be good mirrored explicit agendas required to complete activities successfully – following instructions, working quickly, reading when asked to. These behaviours also provided models for peers, promoting a range of effective work habits that were essential tools skills for more advanced work. Alternatively, if children misunderstood instructions or did not share the teacher's understanding of which features of an activity are most significant, then the explicit agendas became quite different from those the teacher intended. This is perhaps best illustrated by the emphasis on colouring in rather than practising reading and writing that was evident during the worksheet activity.

Being seen to be good also involved some manipulation of the environment in the semi-private world so that rule breaking remained invisible. Children's retaliation to teasing and bickering seldom caught the teacher's eye in this study. However, other studies reveal that there was potential for the children being hassled to be misidentified as the rule breakers instead of their tormentor (Alton-Lee et al., 1999).

Multiple explicit agendas contributed to the way children approached a task at the same time as they simultaneously managed their implicit agendas. When design agendas, such as tidy presentation of work became more important than the explanation agendas there was potential that children would focus on the superficial aspects of worksheet completion, rather than focusing on letter recognition or sentence structure. For example, consider the *k* worksheet included in Appendix 8. A child who was not proficient at colouring in may have spent a lot of time trying to colour in and hurried to identify pictures beginning with *k*. To ensure that there was adequate time for colouring children may have been tempted to watch other children and copy their work, circling the correct items but failing to identify *k* words themselves. Alternatively, children who thought that the primary aim of the task was to produce a beautiful worksheet might have spent most of their time colouring in. The latter is supported by the data, with children frequently commenting on the quality of the colouring component of other students' worksheets and the focus children spending more time colouring than writing and drawing during 13 of the observation sessions.

In addition to multiple design and explanation agendas, there were multiple dimensions for each of these that were open to individual interpretation. For example, Miss B provided a large number of worksheets that provided practice writing a particular letter. (Twenty-eight of Bomber's 77 worksheets, and 27 of Briar's 78 worksheets involved this type of practice.) A child who focused on creating a row of tidy letters may have spent a lot of time creating one or two letters and got less practice than children who considered the number of letters written to be more significant. On the other hand, a child who hurried to finish might have produced a greater number of letters but these may have been rushed and untidy. It may not be clear which dimension – quality or productivity – the teacher was seeking. Individual children's interpretation of teacher instruction and teacher expectations as well as their history of classroom experiences will clearly influence children's decisions. The *a* worksheet completed by Bomber and Briar (see page 101) provides an example of this. Bomber had told Briar that they had to draw a border of *as*, yet he only wrote half a line (26 *as* in total) in the time that she completed her border of over 64 *as*. This was not an isolated incident in terms of Bomber trying to write neatly; on another

occasion he spent more time repeatedly erasing a *B* that he thought was not tidy enough than he spent writing it.

Questions to ponder – issues of balance

In this chapter I have concentrated primarily on how routines impact on children learning to be learners during reading activities, rather than on children learning about reading. Just as it proved difficult to separate activities from the rules and routines embedded in them it has become difficult to discuss the children's experiences of reading instruction without discussing these events in terms of learning. The roles of learner and reader were not the only roles that children were taking, and other roles (e.g., friend, critic) have emerged in this chapter. Learning what it was to manage friendships within the context of the classroom peer culture, and balancing the demands of the peer culture with the official classroom culture is clearly one of the elements that contributes to how the student role is perceived and managed. Learning to balance teacher demands with personal needs, remaining accountable while having fun also influenced the way in which the children approached their reading activities. It is important to acknowledge the complexities of integrating multiple roles while exploring issues of balance between the two key roles – that of the learner and the reader.

Having considered the ways in which rules and routines influenced the development of the children's roles as learners and readers it is also important to consider the realities and the potential impact in terms of balancing classroom demands. It appears that on some occasions a balance between the two roles existed, so that children were comfortable with their environment and task demands and were fully engaged with the reading activities. On other occasions they had the background skills and the confidence to move ahead of their peers. It follows that there were other instances when children could feel out of their depth, unless they received support from their classmates or the teacher. Each of these situations had the potential to promote or hinder learning during reading activities, and contributed to the children's understanding of what counts as reading during reading time.

Security and predictability

Miss B indicated the importance of providing children with a sense of security so that they were ready to focus on learning tasks without feeling anxious about what was going to happen next. Dockett and Perry (2003) made a similar point in relation to rules in New Entrant classrooms, noting how rules played a significant role in children making sense of the school environment. The predictability of the classroom routine certainly contributed to creating an environment where children moved quickly and confidently from one reading activity to another and coped with anticipated interruptions. This easy movement through classroom activities permitted children to engage in multiple learning opportunities, promoting positive academic outcomes and positive social experiences at the same time.

Clay (1985) had reported positive learning outcomes in New Entrant classrooms in a previous study, and noted how early in their school careers children engaged in on-task behaviours during academic classroom tasks. As Miss B argued, a sound understanding of the management component of classroom routines allowed children to concentrate on learning activities. This knowledge also contributed to individuals discovering how to become effective members of the classroom community. Social and academic roles were in balance as a result. A note of caution must be added because although children completed activities successfully, their implicit agendas, anxieties and negative social experiences were often not evident in the final product. Clay's methodology did not reveal the semi-private world to the extent that was possible using the methodology used in my study. As a result, children were identified as on-task based on public responses within very short time frames. While I was monitoring an individual during each observation, a single observer in Clay's study was judging the engagement of six children at a time, and while I had a running record of events that included audio- and video-recordings, the observer in Clay's study relied on brief measures of children's activities. We share common findings, that children participated in academic activities and made progress during their first few months at school. However, I would argue that they spend less time engaged in the academic component of tasks given the degree of attention paid to surface features of tasks and personal agendas.

Becoming a good learner, or student, was about something more than simply feeling secure in the classroom environment however. Mehan (1978) acknowledged that being successful in the classroom is not simply about being academically competent. It also requires children to be aware of the tacit rules of conduct. Being good requires children to manage their explicit and implicit agendas while remaining sensitive to the demands of the social environment. It is helpful at this point to unpack two elements of the student role – doing what it takes to *be* a good student and ensuring that you are *seen* as a good student.

Taking on the good student role

The predictable pattern to classroom routines and the rules associated with these routines appeared to contribute positively to the way in which Bomber and Briar approached learning tasks. Their reading performance improved satisfactorily during the year, with Miss B reporting that they were progressing well in their reading logs. The non-reading skills the children developed during their time in Room 1 provided a solid basis for more advanced study skills and work habits required in future classroom settings. For example, both children followed the teacher's instructions, settled to tasks quickly, worked through in a logical sequence rather than in a random pattern and remained at a task until it was complete. All of these skills are necessary to succeed in academic environments, and it was interesting to note that children began to approach tasks in this way as early as their pre-entry visits. Daily practice ensured that they were fluent in each of the skills by the end of their first year.

Problems may arise at a later date however. After a year at school, Bomber and Briar could explain what they did during classroom activities, but neither clearly articulated how these were connected to reading. St. George and Cullen (1999) challenge teachers to move children from being New Entrants who do tasks and focus on procedural elements of activities to children who explore “the how, what and why” of learning (p. 4). While not advocating that teachers ignore the procedural aspects of tasks, St. George and Cullen stress the importance of explicitly focusing on content and learning processes to promote the development of metacognitive skills. Unless this is attended to children will not become strategic readers and critical thinkers.

The “why” factor remained elusive throughout my study. During their time in Room 1 the children did as they were told without necessarily being aware of the purpose of particular activities or the significance of the strategies they were using. Briar hinted at the importance of practice in our final interview, but this was more in relation to home than the school setting (referring to the importance of buying books so that you could read them frequently), while school tasks were undertaken because she “was supposed to”. Missing the purpose of activities may have limited the children’s definitions of reading as well as redefining what counted as reading and what was valued in the classroom.

This sounds highly critical, and I am certainly not arguing that children should be provided with practice at every study skill during their first year at school – this would only result in an even more crowded curriculum that provides few opportunities to practise any particular skill. Little practice in an unfamiliar environment combined with the pressures of beginning school would have resulted in stress and confusion, as discussed earlier in the chapter. For young children, the sense of security and the number of practice opportunities provided by a regular and predictable set of activities is essential. However, the unpredictability and questioning necessary for more advanced learning must be considered even during the early stages of formal education.

Encouraging students to take risks, to ask questions and look beyond typical boundaries promotes learning, shifting the focus from time on-task to self-regulated learning (Anderson, Stevens et al, 1988). Consider the instruction to colour the kangaroo on the *k* worksheet brown, for example. Why are all kangaroos brown? Why can’t children experiment with colour? Unfortunately, research suggests that children’s approaches to tasks do not necessarily focus on the how, why and when questions that promote learning. Doyle (1983) found that older children are likely to continue to focus on the task itself, rather than the content, so that children may complete activities without learning what the teacher actually intended. Success may represent learning to play the “game” (Collins, 2005, p. 386; Nuthall, 2000e), rather than learning either the content or the purpose of school tasks.

There is an ongoing argument about a balanced approach to reading that debates the strengths and weaknesses of whole-language and phonics strategies (see Nicholson, 2000; Pressley, 2002). Miss B has argued that both are features of her programme. This is discussed in more depth in Chapter Five. The relevant point here is that Miss B did incorporate both approaches in her classroom. However, the children's interview responses did not reflect a balanced approach to reading instruction. Their interpretation of what was important for reading focussed on getting the words right. They succeeded in the classroom activities, appearing to be good students while using different reading strategies from those their teacher intended.

Being seen to be a good student

The routines associated with being a good student influenced the nature of peer interactions in Room 1. In maintaining the appearance of the good student, children have developed semi-visible ways in which to maintain their status within their peer group while presenting an acceptable image to the teacher. Balancing teacher demands and personal needs is a dynamic process, and the children developed a range of strategies that appeared to reduce the time actually spent on-task during reading activities while maintaining the illusion of working hard.

Examples provided earlier in the chapter illustrate two ways in which being seen as a good student by the teacher results in personal agendas taking precedence over explicit agendas. The first way in which maintaining a positive public image interferes with learning is illustrated by the incident involving Bomber, scissors and Freddie's drink bottle. Bomber's anxiety about being reported to the teacher meant that he spent much of the time allocated for worksheet completion engaged in damage control. A number of strategies were required to present a positive image, each of which involved time off-task. Bomber repeatedly asked Freddie to keep the incident a secret, he provided Miss B with an acceptable cause for Freddie's distress when this failed and then, after Miss B's intervention, made several attempts to re-establish his friendship with Freddie. Not only did this limit the time the two boys spent on the

worksheet, but also it disrupted the group reading activity that Miss B was involved in and other children's work as they came to see what was happening.

A second type of incident revealed the amount of time spent ensuring that infractions of rules remained hidden. Sometimes interruptions were very brief – both Bomber and Freddie would cast glances in the teacher's direction as they drew on desktops, for example. On other occasions rule breaking resulted in other children also disengaging from learning activities. For example, Freddie, having finished his worksheet, retrieved toys from the teacher's desk. (They were Freddie's toys, but he was not supposed to have them at school. The teacher had removed them earlier in the morning.) He moved back to the desks and crouched by Bomber's desk so that he could not be seen from the mat, making Bomber complicit in his "crime" and distracting him from his worksheet.

Maintaining a good public image while engaging in friendship and status struggles with peers also interfered with learning yet remained invisible to the teacher. Sydney was involved in a number of incidents that illustrated skilled management of public and private images. Sydney had become quite skilled at teasing and jostling other children while appearing to be a model student – something of a "smiling assassin." While her rule breaking rarely interfered with her own completion of tasks, it frequently prevented her peers from attending to their work although this was seldom reflected in the final product. The product, in this instance, may mask a difficult process or a negative experience. While this issue has been observed and discussed in some depth in relation to group activities (e.g., Kurth, et al., 2002), it may have been overlooked when children were working on individual tasks.

Despite instances of hostility among peers, Miss B promoted an inclusive environment where children were buddied as they entered the classroom and there was a clear expectation that children would support one another throughout their time in Room 1. The children identified themselves as members of groups soon after school entry – members of Room 1, and as members of particular reading groups. Miss B's expectation was that children would be good students, and she ensured that children frequently experienced success, so that they knew this was something they

could achieve. Yet even in a positive environment, children bring their own agendas that sometimes result in being *seen* to be a good student becoming more important than actually *being* a good student in ways that disrupt learning experiences and limit engagement with reading activities.

Shared understandings

I have suggested that there may be a number of issues related to a mismatch between the teacher's intention and the children's management of the classroom environment. The question that arises is whether it matters if understandings were not shared as long as the children completed activities successfully and progressed through the curriculum at an acceptable pace, developing a range of skills that include academic and social skills. There is no clear-cut answer to this question. It is unlikely to matter that children monitored the teacher's position when they were working so that they could look busy at moments when their peer discussion was off-task. Miss B acknowledged that the worksheet activity served both a management purpose, keeping children busy, as well as an academic one, practice with literacy-related concepts. It is unlikely that there was a negative impact on learning if the children did not spend all their allocated time on-task, as long as they were completing the worksheet accurately.

Although the children did not share Miss B's understanding that every morning activity was about reading, they were still engaging in a lot of reading-related tasks. While not identifying aspects of activities as reading in the formal school sense, they were still likely to have made a number of "invisible" reading responses. Even if the children were not aware of the reading-related skills they were practising, it is likely that these helped them become more competent and confident readers.

Children's interpretation of the teacher's instruction and requirements of tasks may, however, have significant effects on what is learned, and on how the children learn to learn (Nuthall, 1999). The children in my study appeared to believe that the product, rather than the process was most important, so that they concentrated on creating exactly what the teacher outlined. The recordings revealed that the focus children

usually remembered which pictures Miss B pointed to and circled these, imitating the teacher. The children were practising imitating or copying rather than focusing on identifying the initial sound of each word. When children completed an activity by glancing at how their neighbour was attending to the same task rather than asking for assistance directly, the child was practising copying rather than letter recognition or writing or any other reading related skill the task was designed to focus on. There was potential for children to miss out on a significant amount of practice with particular concepts, and this might have a negative impact on future performance.

What remained invisible to a large extent, from the teacher's perspective, were the children's voices. How individuals interpreted activities, what they believed was critical in becoming a successful student, how they participated in activities – all of these things remained largely invisible to the teacher. The children renegotiated and reinterpreted the teacher's routines in a way that was generally not openly acknowledged. Perhaps this reveals that it is important for teachers to explicitly separate the management and learning elements of classroom routines.

This brings me back to the notion of multiple goals and roles. The data collected in this study revealed the multiple agendas within reading activities and different understandings of the reading routines that co-existed in Room 1. It is important that I conclude the chapter by pointing out that both children enjoyed being members of the classroom, they liked having Miss B as their teacher, and they both established friendships that they valued. In addition, Bomber and Briar experienced success frequently and both are progressing well academically. So, regardless of the multiple roles that they have taken and the understandings that they had of the classroom routine and all that routine involves, both children were learning what it was to be a successful learner as well as becoming more confident and competent readers. While their notions of what counted as reading within the classroom routine remained rather limited after one year at school, their reading skills were steadily improving. School reading was still associated with getting the words right, but both children indicated that meaning was also important. The children's understanding of the purpose of particular activities, or their perception of what was relevant, changed over time as well. This was illustrated by one of Briar's comments during one of her post-

observation interviews, when she acknowledged that some reading might be necessary to complete worksheets after all.

Chapter Five

BEING AN ELEPHANT: LEARNING ABOUT READING GROUPS

The previous chapter examined the ways in which classroom routines contributed to children's understandings of what it is to be a learner in a classroom setting, and this chapter develops that theme further by discussing one of the routine activities, reading groups, in more depth. The Ministry of Education (1996) has acknowledged that this activity is "the heart of the reading programme for early and fluent readers" (p. 86), and it was certainly one of the central features of Miss B's reading programme, being one of only two activities completed every day. It was also the only activity in which Bomber and Briar thought they learned to read. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the ways in which the use of reading groups influenced Bomber and Briar's definitions of reading and their participation in the act of reading.

The chapter begins with a brief look at where reading groups sit within the general structure of Miss B's reading programme. The remainder of the chapter focuses on Bomber's and Briar's experiences during the reading group activity, exploring classroom events in relation to their interview responses.

The discussion of reading groups begins with an outline of the key components of the activity. I will use the classroom observation data to discuss the time spent in reading groups in relation to the amount of reading practice offered, and to the types of responses children made. The assistance and feedback Miss B provided is discussed. The chapter closes by raising a number of issues related to the types of skills and knowledge being practised during the reading group task.

Where Reading Groups sit within the general reading programme

As outlined in Chapter Three, the morning routine in Room 1 was made up of seven tasks. Five of these were designed to teach reading related knowledge, skills and behaviours. In addition there were assessment components built into the reading group and tidy up activities.

Each observation session lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. The time spent on each activity varied from day to day, as summarised on Table 8.

Table 8

Summary of Time Spent on Each Reading Task

Activity	Number of events observed	*Range of the number of minutes spent on activity	Average number of minutes spent on activity
News	18	17.0	9.7
Reading group ^a	19	7.0	11.6
Letter of the week	15	9.5	5.4
Big book	9	6.0	7.6
Worksheet - instruction	19	9.0	4.3
Worksheet - completion ^a	19	42.0	20.1
Free choice ^a	16	35.0	22.3
Tidy up	17	9.0	4.2

^a The times listed are representative of the whole class for four of the activities. The exceptions are reading group, worksheet completion and free choice. The times listed for these activities apply only to the focus child wearing a live microphone.

* Range = the highest minus the lowest number.

The children determined how long they spent on their worksheets and free choice activities, neither of which was closely supervised. These activities also accounted for the greatest variation in time spent on any activity, with ranges of 42 minutes and 35 minutes respectively. The data presented on Table 8 reveals that the average time spent on worksheet completion was 20.1 minutes and an average of 22.3 minutes was spent in the free choice area. Therefore, the longest periods of time during reading sessions were spent engaged in independent and unsupervised tasks. Analysis of the

time spent working on the worksheet task has revealed that little of this time was actually spent reading or writing. This indicates that much of the time dedicated to reading may not be used effectively.

Miss B determined how much time was spent on each of the remaining activities. Non-reading activities (news and tidying up) accounted for an average of 13.9 minutes of each 60 – 90 minute reading session. The remainder of the available reading time was spent focused on closely supervised literacy activities. There was a more consistent pattern in the time spent on each of these tasks, with the range being less than 10 minutes for each activity.

How the reading group contributed to other activities

Reading group membership determined, to some extent, what children did during other reading activities. The focus children were members of the elephants group from the time Briar started school until the end of the school year. Worksheets were group specific on 14 of the 19 observation sessions. Each group also had a dedicated box of books at the back of the classroom that Miss B regularly updated. Members of each group could access their box during free choice or whenever they had free time during the day. The children usually completed free choice activities with children from their reading group too, possibly because classmates in other groups were reading with the teacher or still engaged with their worksheets.

Group membership also appeared to contribute to classroom identity, in a similar way that being a member of a school “house” made each child a member of a community within the school. Children were often called as a group, rather than individually, particularly when being instructed on worksheets, called to the mat for reading or when submitting worksheets to the teacher. This appeared to be primarily a management device used by the teacher but it may also have been significant for the children. When I asked Bomber about his friends during one of the interviews, he identified Freddie as an elephant before he told me anything else about their friendship, and he commonly talked about the elephants at other times.

Defining the reading group activity

The reading group activity was introduced in broad terms in Chapter Four. In this chapter the activity will be discussed in detail, so it is important to describe the sequence of events in more depth at this point. The activity described below is commonly referred to as *guided reading* in New Zealand classrooms, but I have used the term *reading group* to avoid any confusion with the *guided reading procedure* outlined by Searfoss et al., (2001). The procedure Searfoss et al. describe is an intensive child-led comprehension exercise that is designed for use with “fact-laden” texts (p. 233), and is not appropriate as a daily exercise. I selected the term reading group for a second reason as well. During the interviews with the focus children, this was the term they used when talking about the activity so I have used the term to more accurately reflect their experience and voice. The reading group provided daily teacher-led reading instruction for emergent and early readers in Room 1.

Essentially, the reading group activity was comprised of three key stages: an organisational component, an instruction component and a closing. As with the general programme, this activity began with an organisational component designed to settle and focus children on the task at hand. Miss B called a group to the mat and positioned the children so that each child had an unobstructed view of the whiteboard and the teacher. She ensured that there was sufficient space between the group and the whiteboard so that books could be laid out on the floor during instruction. Then Miss B collected in the books that children had taken home on the previous day.

The instruction component that followed took up most of the time set aside for each reading group. There was some variation in the routine, but basically events proceeded in the following sequence: review, introduction, new content, reading. The teacher often reviewed words and concepts that the children had been taught recently, or those that had some relevance for the book they were about to read. She then introduced the book the children were to read, holding up a single copy of the book for the children to look at and discuss. New words and concepts were taught. Miss B handed out individual copies of the book to each of the children. The children placed the copies of the books on the floor in front of them, so that Miss B could monitor page turning and tracking as the children read with her.

The children read the text aloud during their reading group activity. There were two common types of reading: chorusing and round robin. Chorusing, as the term suggests, involved all children reciting the text together with the teacher. The round robin component required children to take turns to read individually, usually a page at a time. The teacher selected when children were to read, generally following the order in which children were seated. Children usually engaged in both types of reading during the reading group activity, although there were exceptions to this. There were three occasions when the child wearing the active microphone did not read individually and the children did not chorus during two of the sessions.

In addition to reading aloud, children were encouraged to respond to the books using a range of reading skills and knowledge during the instruction component of the activity. For example:

- Children were asked questions about parts of the stories and how these related to their own experiences.
- Children were encouraged to use illustrations to make predictions or explain storylines.
- Children were asked repeatedly to identify particular words on the whiteboard or in the book.
- Beginning letters of words and the corresponding sounds were identified.

At the end of the task children were told to put the books in their reading covers, so that they could take the book home to read to their parents that evening. During the first few weeks at school, children were often handed a high frequency word card at this point and encouraged to take the words home to learn them. Miss B also regularly (but not daily) checked the children's reading logs.

Of all of the events that made up the reading group activity, the children only referred to one of these during their interviews – both of them told me that they read to their teacher on their own. As can be seen from the events described above, a limited amount of the time the children spent in reading groups involved this sort of interaction. A closer examination of the reading group task revealed that the amount of time spent in reading groups was not an accurate reflection of the time individual children spent engaged in reading responses.

Time spent in reading groups – what happened when the routine changed

During the final two observation sessions the elephants were seated on the mat in their group for over 20 minutes, a longer period than usual. These two irregular reading group events illustrated the impact of changes in routine on the children's behaviour. The children managed each exception in a different way that impacted not only on their behaviour, but also on how much time they spent reading.

During observation 18 Mrs D, a student teacher, was on full control. She called the elephants group to the mat, collected in the previous day's reading book, and told the children not to touch the new books before moving away to assist other children with their worksheets for almost 10 minutes. The children engaged in play more typical of the playground than the classroom while unsupervised, and were reprimanded by Mrs D reprimanded seven times.

During observation 19 Mrs C, the relieving teacher, called the elephants to the mat before she finished working with the previous group. Mrs C suggested that the children in the elephants group read the previous day's book "with their eyes" while she finished with the other group. Although unsupervised, the children chatted to one another quietly and engaged with text, as instructed for more than six minutes.

On both occasions the children sat on the mat waiting for the teacher for a much longer period than they were used to. The key difference between the two events appears to be the provision of a task, which provided some structure during the extended waiting time. When they were given a task to complete, the children showed a degree of flexibility and adapted to the change in routine, engaging in appropriate social and reading behaviours. Without a reading task, the group became unsettled and disruptive, which was out of character for children who usually tried to present themselves as good students.

Time spent reading aloud

The children both told me that they sat in their reading group and read their new book to their teacher when they were learning to read. They did not appear to include discussion of the book, reviewing old material or the teaching of new material as significant features of the activity. While the children spent an average of 11 minutes engaged in the reading group activity, a much shorter period of time was spent reading aloud, as presented in Table 9. The table reveals that the children spent an average of 2.3 minutes reading aloud from their reading books, less than 20% of the time available. (A small number of additional words were read from the whiteboard.) Of the time spent reading aloud, only an average 0.4 minutes was spent reading individually.

Table 9

The Number of Minutes that Bomber and Briar Spent Reading Aloud During Reading Group Task

Activity	Total time in minutes	Range of time spent on activity (minutes)	Average time (minutes)
Reading in chorus	36.6	6.1	1.9
Reading individually	7.4	1.2	0.4
Total time reading aloud	44.0	6.5	2.3
Total time in reading group	235.0	7.0	12.4

* Only one focus child at a time was observed and recorded during each observation.

There was one session during which the focus child (Bomber) spent more than 50 per cent of the time available engaged in making reading responses. On this occasion discussion of the book, questioning, teacher modelling and management were intertwined with the chorusing component of the activity, so this did not accurately represent the actual time spent reading.

Such brief periods of time spent reading aloud were unlikely to be adequate for developing reading skills. This claim is supported by research that spans over thirty years. Smith (1977) has argued for decades that children learn to read by reading.

More recently Cowen (2003) has highlighted the need for frequent and prolonged periods of reading during reading instruction, citing several major studies including Adams (1990), and Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, and Wilkinson (1985). A common feature of the studies reviewed by Cowen was concern that young children in the United States were not doing enough reading at school, with young children spending as little as seven to eight minutes per day reading independently (p. 34). Reading group was only one of a group of reading tasks the children in Room 1 participated in, but the brief time spent reading aloud raises questions about whether this activity provided adequate provision for reading practice. While the children in my study were in their reading group for longer periods than those reported by Cowen, they made reading responses for a much briefer time. The children were exposed to reading-related concepts and talked around key features of the text they read, but did not read for extended periods.

Time spent chorusing

Children chorused sections of the text during 17 of the 19 observations. The average amount of time spent making chorused responses was 1.9 minutes, which is presented in Table 9. On eight occasions the children chorused the entire book, but the amount of text chorused diminished during later observation sessions as the children became more skilled at reading. Typically, the children read each page of text only once during chorusing. The time children spent chorusing reduced sharply once children had been at school for six weeks and the children did not chorus at all during observations 16 and 17.

Time spent reading individually

The focus children spent less than one minute reading on their own during all but one observation session. On this occasion Bomber read the title and two pages of text, but was required to read each repeatedly. Children usually each read one or two pages of text during round robin reading, repeating the whole page, or sections of it, if they made errors. Each page typically contained a single sentence. The focus child wearing

the active microphone was not invited to read during three of the observation sessions. (On one occasion nobody was called on to read individually, but on the other two occasions other children had the opportunity to read.)

To ascertain how accurately the focus children's time spent reading individually represented the time group members read for, I calculated the time each child read independently within the elephants group. I discovered that group members seldom read for the same length of time within a single session, and there was a broad range (0.0 – 1.6 minutes) across sessions. I noted that some children had additional turns during five of the observation sessions, but this did not appear to account for the general differences in time spent reading aloud. Despite the sharp decrease in the time spent chorusing in the later observations, there was not a consistent corresponding increase in time spent reading individually. The most influential factor in the time spent reading during the round robin was related to the difficulty individual children had reading the text correctly. If children struggled to read correctly then the teacher spent longer with them, providing corrections and prompts until the child could respond correctly. In contrast, if children read a page correctly, they were only required to read the passage once.

The number of words read during reading group

The amount of time engaged in reading aloud represented only a surface feature of classroom experience. The data presented on Table 10 reveals that Bomber and Briar read, on average, 37.8 and 39.3 words respectively during reading group. This shows that, despite the brief periods spent reading aloud, a relatively large number of overt responses were made in a short period of time. Although the children only read the text in full during five observations they still averaged nearly forty words a session. Individual children were never required to read the entire text during the round robin. On each occasion the text was read in full this occurred during chorusing.

Table 10

The Number of Words Bomber and Briar Read During Reading Groups

Activity	Bomber		Briar	
	Range of number of words	Average number of words	Range of number of words	Average number of words
Total number of words in reading book	45	52.8	75	47.2
Number of words to be chorused	39	16.4	48	24.9
Actual words chorused	52	21.3	72	31.1
Number of words to be read individually	13	8.9	13	5.3
Actual words read individually	49	16.5	19	8.2
Total number of words read	62	37.8	53	39.3

Table 10 also reveals the variation between the number of words to be chorused or read individually and the number of words children actually read. While Bomber was presented with an average of 16.4 words to chorus, the average number of words he chorused was 21.3. Briar was presented with an average of 24.9 words, yet she chorused 31.1. This difference arose because children often repeated parts of sentences or entire sentences.

This repetition of particular sections of the text was more marked during round robin reading. Although the number of words read individually was much smaller than during chorused reading, the percentage of words repeated was higher. Bomber read an average of 16.5 words, having been presented with 8.9 words, and Briar read an average of 8.2 words when presented with an average of 5.3 words. Additional words were usually related to correction of errors during the round robin, as mentioned earlier, providing additional practice for children who were finding the text difficult. For example, Bomber was required to read the following text: *It is a windy day*. He read, "It's windy." The teacher got him to repeat the full sentence twice, prompting him when he hesitated or made errors. As a result, Bomber read a total of 13 words rather than the 5 written on the page.

Repetition during chorusing usually occurred because children chorused with a single copy of the book and then repeated some sections when they were handed individual copies. Difficult or unfamiliar passages were also repeated on occasion. For example, when the elephants were reading a book titled *A*, the final page of text was much more difficult than the preceding pages. While most pages had a two word sentence (e.g., *A path. A wolf.*), the final page read *and a girl called Red Riding Hood*. The children chorused this page twice during the introduction and then chorused it once again when they were reading individual copies of the book. Briar read the sentence three times as a result, although, in contrast to the previous example, she was still not responding correctly to the text by the final read through. Briar added “little” after *called* during each reading.

While the children typically read a greater number of words than those written on the page there were matches during a number of sessions. There was a match between the number of words to be chorused and the actual words chorused during six observations; four of these occurred when the children had been at school for a number of weeks. The number of words to be read individually and those actually read matched during three observation sessions. On each occasion Bomber was required to read a small number of words (three, six and seven).

Types of responses made when reading aloud

While time spent engaged in making reading responses and the number of words they read provide a helpful starting point when examining children’s reading experiences, it became evident during the analysis of the classroom data that the focus children were not simply reading the text aloud during chorusing and the round robin. They were responding to the instruction to read aloud in four different ways. I have classified the children’s responses under four headings:

- | | |
|---------|--|
| Correct | - verbal responses were correct and well-timed |
| Error | - verbal responses were incorrect |
| Skipped | - no verbal response was made |
| Delayed | - verbal responses followed correct responses made by others after a very short delay, often only a second or less |

These types of responses were not always evident during observations, and it is unlikely that the teachers working with them detected the full range of responses the children were using. I heard error responses during the round robin, but was seldom aware of them during chorusing when observing in the classroom. The skipped and delayed responses only became evident when I was analysing sections of classroom recordings and could only be clearly identified from digital copies of the audio-track. What this microanalysis of the data provided was a degree of scrutiny that is simply not available to teachers, even when working with small groups. Furthermore, it revealed that the two children were managing the chorusing and round robin components of group reading in different ways, so I will discuss each of these separately.

Types of responses during chorusing

A summary of the ways in which children responded during chorusing appears in Table 11. What is clear from the table is how many of the children's responses, particularly Bomber's, were not correct. Bomber responded correctly to 33.6 per cent of the words, while 49.8 per cent of Briar's responses were correct. These values are much less than the accuracy rates generally recommended for instructional materials. Searfoss et al. (2001) advise that 95 per cent is appropriate for word recognition, and 70 per cent for comprehension. Even the level Searfoss et al. describe as the "frustration" level (p. 128) is much higher, at 90 per cent accuracy for word recognition.

While the entire book was chorused during five observations, the focus children did not actually read every word correctly during any session. While they made few errors (3.0 and 3.5 per cent respectively), the children's skipped and delayed responses accounted for a significant number of their utterances. The combined use of these two types of responses accounted for 63.4 per cent of Bomber's total responses, and 46.7 per cent of Briar's reading responses.

Table 11

Percentage of Types of Responses Bomber and Briar Made During Chorused Reading

Type of response	Bomber		Briar	
	Range of responses	Actual responses	Range of responses	Actual responses
Correct	54.2	33.6	36.1	49.8
Error	10.7	3.0	8.9	3.5
Skipped	73.9	39.9	19.8	12.4
Delayed	45.0	23.5	33.6	34.3

Delayed responses were the most difficult type of response to detect. The pacing of the chorusing contributed to this as children could often slip back into the rhythm of reading very quickly so that delays were followed with a correct response and any hesitation was hidden. Similarly, errors were masked by group responses during chorusing. A lone voice was difficult to pick out, even when the group was small.

The children made few errors, so little comment can be made about these. It should be noted that errors did not appear to be random. Most errors were sensible substitutions; such as Briar reading “Mum is asleep” instead of *Mum is sleeping*. While the following two errors were isolated incidents, they may be indicative of the impact of familiar storylines or books. Bomber read two words incorrectly during his second pre-entry visit when children were handed their individual copies of the book. Although the group had just finished chorusing the text, when asked to chorus the title (*All Kinds of Things*) for a second time Bomber began with “I go”, the first two words of each sentence in the book he had just returned. An incident during Briar’s reading suggests that storylines influence how children engage with unfamiliar versions of favourite stories. As noted earlier, Briar repeatedly added the word *little* when reading a book called *A* which outlined the story of Red Riding Hood.

Both children made considerably more delayed responses and skipped responses than errors. However, the two children appeared to use these in different ways. Skipped responses accounted for almost 40 per cent of all Bomber’s chorusing, while Briar used nearly three times as many delayed responses as she did skips. While it remains unclear why the children responded in these ways, it was evident that the children managed the task differently.

It was difficult to determine from the data whether skipped and delayed responses were subtle forms of error responses or whether they were actually correct responses. Skipped words may actually have been silent responses, and delayed responses may simply have been points at which the focus children failed to keep pace with their peers and the teacher. However, neither of these explanations seems likely. The focus children had told me that they read to the teacher during reading group; so silent reading was an unlikely response to make during chorusing. Furthermore, on the rare occasions that children were asked to read silently in Room 1 during the observation period they were asked to “read with their eyes”. This instruction was never given during the chorus component of group reading.

With respect to delayed responses, some of the elephants responded slightly ahead of their peers occasionally, so a slight lag was equally possible. There were no examples of Briar reading faster than her peers and only two clear examples of Bomber reading ahead so it seems unlikely that delays simply related to a pacing error. While there was no conclusive evidence that delayed responses should be counted as error responses during the chorusing component of group reading, patterns of responses when individuals were reading suggest that these delays were examples of imitating rather than reading responses. Evidence supporting the notion that skipped and delayed responses were types of error responses emerged during analysis of the children reading individually during round robin reading.

Types of responses during round robin reading

The key difference between chorusing and round robin responses was the degree to which individual responses were public. Incorrect utterances and missed responses were obvious to the rest of the group and to the teacher, and provided Miss B with a more accurate sense of children’s accuracy rates. Miss B provided prompts and feedback to each of these, in contrast to what happened during chorusing. The data presented in Table 12 outlines the types of responses the focus children made during the round robin component of the reading group task, when individual children read to the teacher. The table shows some clear changes in the way the children responded during the round robin. There was a marked difference in the percentage of correct

responses during chorused reading (33.6 per cent of Bomber's responses, and 49.8 per cent of Briar's responses) and round robin reading (76.2 per cent and 69.3 per cent respectively). However, it must be noted that the values discussed are percentages and not actual responses, and that a considerably smaller number of words were read during the round robin than during chorused reading (as outlined on Table 10).

While the children made considerably more correct responses, they also made a greater number of error responses (9.6 per cent and 16.3 per cent respectively). An increase in both corrects and errors seemed illogical at first glance, but this was related to the changes in the frequency of skipped and delayed responses.

Table 12

Percentage of Types of Responses Bomber and Briar Made During Round Robin Reading

Type of response	Bomber		Briar	
	Range of responses	Actual responses	Range of responses	Actual responses
Correct	73.7	76.2	40.0	69.3
Error	33.3	9.6	25.0	16.3
Skipped	13.6	2.5	25.0	9.9
Delayed	47.4	11.7	10.5	4.5

The percentage of delayed responses the children made reduced sharply during round robin reading. Bomber skipped words far less often as well, although there was little change in Briar's skipped responses. The ways in which skips and delays were used, and the way in which Miss B responded to them supported the notion that these were subtle error responses. The interaction around skipped and delayed responses involved the teacher providing prompts and support that increased the likelihood that the children would respond correctly. This type of support was typically associated with errors rather than correct responses in my study.

Skipped responses occurred during round robin reading despite a clear expectation that the children would read all the words on the page(s) aloud. Recordings reveal that the children only missed words in the text when the teacher had already uttered them. Children moved their index fingers along the sentence as the teacher said the word

then read aloud the words that followed, so it was highly unlikely that these skips were instances of silent reading. When a word was missed, the teacher got the child to repeat part of, or the whole sentence for all but two of the skipped responses recorded. This repetition suggests that the teacher viewed skips as error responses.

The two focus children used delayed responses in a slightly different way during the round robin. Bomber's use of delays was similar to those the children used during chorusing, when they repeated what others had said and continued to read. His delays were often associated with words that occurred infrequently in the book, or changes in the regular pattern of the text. For example, in the book *Out in the weather*, each page describes a different sort of weather pattern (*It is a _____ day. Look at us.*). Bomber was the third child to read. The previous pages had been about rainy and cloudy days. Bomber was to read *It is a windy day. Look at us.* He read "windy" and "look" as delayed responses both times he was required to read the page. Similarly, the final page of a book was often different to the rest of the text. Bomber also used delayed responses to manage this change as well. Each delayed response followed a verbal model provided by the teacher or one of the other elephants. Bomber's repetitions support the claim that delayed responses were not independent correct attempts at words (reading responses), but were more likely to be imitating responses. Briar did not use delays very often, but her hesitations during the seventeenth observation session were associated with a different sort of prompt from the teacher. During that session the teacher provided less explicit prompts than the models provided in earlier sessions, asking what the beginning letter was at one point, and re-reading the earlier part of the sentence that Briar had read on another occasion.

There was a clear difference between the way that Miss B responded to errors during the round robin and the way she responded during chorusing. While there was some repetition of particular pages during chorusing, specific errors made by the focus children were not corrected explicitly during any of the observations. It is highly likely that most were not detected. In contrast, children's responses were public during the round robin, so that errors, skips and delays were addressed, providing support and additional practice opportunities when children struggled to read the text correctly.

What other skills were the children practising during reading group?

The ways in which children verbally responded during reading raises an important question in terms of the actual amount of practice they were getting at reading. I have established that the children spent only a small amount of time in their reading groups, but had multiple opportunities to read during this activity. The way they responded when reading aloud provided some evidence of the way they were using reading opportunities during reading groups, but their non-verbal responses and interview responses provided additional information about what was happening when the children were not reading aloud. Stahl and Heubach (2005) report that the amount, rather than the breadth, of reading is important, particularly for young readers. It is important to consider how much reading Bomber and Briar were actually doing in their reading group. Recordings and observation schedules suggested that the children were focused on the book for much of their time in their reading group, but it was important to examine which skills they were practising in each phase of the activity a little more closely.

Introduction and review

This phase of reading group usually involved a teacher-led discussion about the book, specific words and related concepts. There was an emphasis on making sense of the story, with children being asked to make predictions about the story and to make connections with their own experience. During this phase of the activity children were frequently encouraged to use the illustrations to get a sense of what was happening in the story.

The children were also provided with multiple opportunities to identify words and beginning letters and sounds. Sometimes these were isolated events, but there were also times when children were encouraged to use cues from both the illustrations and the text. For example, when looking at a page that read *A cottage*. The children initially identified it as “A house.” Miss B then encouraged them to use the beginning sound of the word written on the facing page to identify what type of house it was.

The children were not simply engaging in reading related skills during the introduction, but also getting some practice with general classroom skills. The children followed several basic classroom rules during this phase of the activity (e.g., sitting quietly, watching, listening and turn taking). Children also raised their hands and waited until they were called on before responding to any questions. Children who called out were reminded of the rule and how turn taking ensured that all the children's ideas could be heard. If children persisted in calling out they were reprimanded. The children appeared to focus on the task at hand, usually looking at Miss B, the children answering questions, or the materials Miss B was using. Although there was some fidgeting, the children seldom whispered or touched their peers as they commonly did during the news activity.

During their interviews the focus children did not refer to this phase of the activity explicitly. They talked about reading to the teacher during reading group, which suggests that they were either unaware of many of the reading skills being practised when books were introduced, or were aware of these skills but simply did not classify them as reading. During their interviews both children stressed that they learned to read on their own in their group, and that learning to read was about getting the words right. The turn taking and one-to-one interaction during the discussion around identifying words and beginning sounds would count as reading according to their interview responses. The focus on meaning and the importance of predicting storylines or connecting them to their own lives was not evident when the children talked about classroom reading during interviews.

Chorusing

The children spent most of the chorusing period looking at the book and following the teacher's finger as she tracked each word being read. As noted earlier, many of the verbal types of responses the children made remained largely invisible even to those children seated nearby, but meant that on many occasions children may have used less than 50 per cent of the reading practice opportunities available to them. Even if they were imitating rather than reading on many occasions they may well have been getting plenty of practice tracking and engaging in general reading skills as they

listened to the rest of their group and looked at the book – tracking left to right, recognising the function of a full stop, and identifying connections between text and illustrations.

The chorusing section of the reading group activity also raised the issue of the roles children take during reading tasks. Bomber and Briar maintained the image of the good student when they participated in chorusing – participating while limiting the number of visible errors. This may indicate that the children became skilled at anticipating what Miss B expected during group tasks, something that is evident in more senior classrooms (Nuthall, 2002). There were few, if any, teacher reprimands during this event and corrective feedback was directed at the group as a whole. Any feedback was generally related to particular words that the whole group stumbled on. Individual feedback, when provided, generally occurred when children had individual copies of the book. Feedback usually related to page turning, finger pointing or looking at the text, all somewhat mechanical and highly visible aspects of the task.

The children's responses suggest that they were managing their environment so that they appeared competent, even when they found the text difficult. Errors were generally masked by the group response, but few obvious errors, or incorrect utterances were made. Bomber and Briar have both decreased the degree of risk and ambiguity in their environment by skipping words or imitating their peers – both strategies remained invisible to those working with them, allowing them to maintain the appearance of competent students while limiting their interaction with print. Their level of engagement with the task may have been related to management rather than to learning (Nuthall, 2005), as their public behaviour maintained an appropriate classroom image. The children became skilled at being successful students while reducing the number of experiences with the reading skills the teacher intended them to practice.

The children effectively managed their environment by following the rules of the activity. They did not disrupt the rhythm of the chorus, they did not distract their peers, they participated in reading (on a visible level) and they followed the teacher's instructions. At the same time they were both playing a role that defined them within

the classroom – they were elephants. The children took part in this group activity as members of the group, without drawing attention to themselves as “other”. This formed another part of their classroom identity, and promoted a sense of belonging. Just as Bomber and Briar skipped words and imitated their fellow elephants it is likely that their peers did the same. The group, therefore were clearly supporting one another so that each of them might be deemed competent by the teacher. As such they were in collusion with one another – the semi-private world determining what was presented in the public world of the classroom.

It is not clear whether the children were consciously aware of the skills they were developing so early in their school careers. Neither Bomber nor Briar acknowledged peer assistance when we talked about tackling difficult parts of texts, nor did they refer to imitating or delayed responses. The children may not have considered the chorusing component to be reading practice at all. After all, both Bomber and Briar told me that although they were sitting in their groups to read, children read to the teacher on their own. This implies that the children saw the individual reading component as the key feature of learning to read in Room 1. A closer examination of the individual reading was necessary to determine whether the children’s responses differed in the round robin reading as much as their interview statements would suggest.

Round robin

The children spent little time reading aloud during this phase of the activity. The group size ranged from three to nine during the observation period. During our interviews Briar had told me that she liked small reading groups because she got more turns at reading. However, this did not appear to be a common experience during the observation period of this study, and Briar was not present on the three occasions I observed multiple turns. Children typically got one turn at reading aloud. The whole group got two opportunities to read individually during only three observations, twice when there were three children in the elephants group and once when there were four children present. Regardless of the number of opportunities to read aloud, children

spent most of their time following the text with their finger and listening to others reading aloud.

According to the children's definition ("I read to the teacher on my own"), little reading was performed during this phase of the reading group. The children were instructed to look at their books and point to the words when others were reading, so they had a lot of practice at tracking instead. Tracking as others read was helpful because it let children "know what the other person is talking", as Bomber put it. While this behaviour was common during the round robin, children were not always looking at their books as they moved their finger. During their pre-entry visits and first week at school both children looked to see where other children were pointing before they pointed to their own page, but this was not clearly evident in the following weeks at school. The accuracy of tracking increased over time. Both children glanced at their peers or where their peers were pointing during all but one of the observation sessions, and sometimes stopped tracking while watching others.

When the children talked about what happened when others were reading aloud they told me that they were listening to the other children, and Briar told me that she didn't really look at the words. This suggests that, although giving the appearance of tracking, the children may have simply been following the direction of the print without processing the text. Listening also requires quite different skills to reading. Listening to repeated passages might have increased familiarity with the rhythm of the text and any patterns, but it is unlikely that it directly contributed to the word identification ("getting the words right") that was the key feature of this activity from the children's perspective. This does not mean that the children were not developing strategies that would help them to correctly identify words though. Listening to other children would have made it easier to predict which word came next, particularly if their turn came after several other children.

Children appeared to attend to the corrective feedback and prompts Miss B provided, even when it was not their turn to read. They glanced at Miss B and watched what she was doing repeatedly throughout the round robin, even if not directly participating in the exchange.

Feedback and prompting

Miss B provided a range of prompts and feedback throughout the reading group activity. When I talked with the focus children about what happened when they got stuck on words, they told me about different ways in which Miss B supported their learning. Briar talked about Miss B using the whiteboard and focusing on beginning letters. She also mentioned sounding out words as a strategy, and using illustrations to get a sense of what was happening in stories. Bomber, in contrast, did not think that he used illustrations as aids when struggling with text. He told me that when he got stuck at school he went back to a word he knew and started again with Miss B's help. An examination of the children's interview responses in relation to the classroom data suggests that each of the children's responses are consistent, but that they have emphasised different features of the interaction with Miss B.

Miss B frequently used the whiteboard during the introduction phase of the reading group activity, often using it to recap particular words or concepts. Children were then required to identify or discuss these. The whiteboard was also used to introduce new words and concepts. Generally Miss B wrote particular words on the whiteboard, but sometimes she used other methods to support the point she was making. For example, the children were taught the words *up* and *down* in Briar's second week at school. Miss B drew a picture of a seesaw on the whiteboard and talked about the concepts of up and down as well as getting the children to identify the words written on the board. Once or twice, children were asked to write on the whiteboard too, copying what the teacher had written. The whiteboard was used less often when children were reading aloud.

Miss B repeatedly made reference to the beginning letters of words and the corresponding sounds during all but one observation session. Sometimes this strategy was used during the introduction phase, and it was used frequently during round robin reading. Miss B specifically referred to the first letter of words that Briar misidentified twice during round robin reading. While sounding out the initial letter, blend or digraph was common practice in Room 1, sounding out entire words was rare. Once the initial sound was identified, Miss B generally modelled the whole word if children continued to have difficulty identifying it.

Errors were identified and corrective feedback and praise were consistently provided during discussion and round robin reading. Most of the focus throughout the observation period was on word recognition, with some discussion of punctuation. During the final observation session an additional dimension was added, with the teacher encouraging the children to read without pointing if they were able, and to focus on the flow of their reading, encouraging them not to be “jerky” readers.

The most common feedback and prompting device used during the round robin was modelling. Miss B read the word(s) that children found difficult, with the children skipping them and reading on or making delayed responses after each word. Miss B would then usually get them to repeat the sentence. Miss B also read with the children during chorusing, effectively providing a model of the appropriate pace, intonation and expression as well as the correct words.

Illustrations were used frequently when encouraging children to make sense of the story, particularly during the introduction phase. This strategy was used repeatedly during every observation session. Each of the children was encouraged to use the picture when they struggled with unfamiliar words during round robin reading too, Bomber to identify *magnets* and Briar to identify *squirrel*. Bomber may not have associated this with reading assistance because it was seldom used explicitly during round robin reading.

Bomber’s emphasis on going back and starting with words he knew may relate to another common strategy used in Room 1. When children struggled with the text during the round robin, or the teacher did not hear them clearly children were often asked to repeat part or the entire sentence. This happened to Bomber five times when he wore the active microphone. Briar was also required to repeat sentences during three observation sessions, and she self-initiated it on a fourth occasion.

The strategies the children identified were not the only ways in which Miss B supported the children during reading group. She frequently asked children to identify particular words in isolation throughout each observation, so that they got additional practice with word recognition. The children were encouraged to make predictions

about storylines during 12 observations. This became more common the longer the children were at school, sometimes requiring an explanation rather than just a statement. Texts were related to the children's experiences during the introduction in all but four observation sessions, providing a connection before children read the book.

In addition, there was some sense that there was an overlap between management and learning with some of the prompts provided by the teacher. There were frequent reminders to point to words and repeated instructions to turn the page when children read aloud. This continued throughout the observation period. It was not clear whether these instructions were to assist with reading or whether they were employed as a management strategy to keep everyone at the same pace, and allow the teacher to monitor whether children were tracking accurately.

It would appear that while the children were aware of a number of strategies being used to support them learning to read, there were less explicit forms of assistance threaded through the activities. For example, Miss B leaned forward and pointed to correct words on children's books as other children read, and nodded to children when they attempted words but appeared to be unsure if they were correct. The children may also have been providing themselves with additional assistance, using their peers' actions as models for their own behaviour. As noted earlier, they frequently looked at other children and where these children were pointing during the round robin, rather than looking at their own books.

Having looked at the children's experiences in some depth, and considered these in relation to what the children told me about reading groups during their interviews, it is important to consider some of the issues that arose in relation to learning to read.

The impact of round robin reading on reading practice

The general description of guided reading provided by the Ministry of Education (2003) is consistent with many of the elements central to Miss B's reading groups, including introducing text, reading text and discussing text. Miss B's focus for the emergent and early readers in her class was on reading skills rather than discussion, but some time was spent talking about the book when it was introduced each day. This too is consistent with Ministry advice. However, the inclusion of the round robin component in the reading group activity was contentious, and conflicts strongly with the advice provided by the Ministry of Education.

“Round robin” reading, where each student takes a turn at reading aloud, is never appropriate in guided reading. It prevents each student from processing the text and constructing meaning independently, distracts and bores other children, and obscures meaning.

(Ministry of Education, 2003, p. 98)

The children's comments during interviews supported this claim to some degree, with evidence that children were not focusing on the text during this phase of their group task. Briar commented that she didn't read when other children were reading aloud, and that she wasn't always looking at the text during round robin reading either. Bomber's comments were a little more ambiguous. Although he did not explicitly talk about not reading when it was not his turn during the round robin, he made the comment that pointing to the words let him “know what the other person is talking”.

The children also appeared to focus on getting the words right during reading group, which suggested that word recognition and being correct was more important than meaning. Both children still hinted that meaning had a role when reading at school, with Bomber noting that words told him what books were about and Briar talking about “looking at pictures and thinking the words”, but making sense of text did not seem to be a primary goal.

The impact on meaning is an important consideration. As noted above, the children thought that accurate word recognition was the way to succeed in school reading. Miss B encouraged the children to construct meaning from the text, but this was more

explicit in discussion of the book than during the round robin. The children viewed reading to the teacher individually as the time they were learning to read though, so less explicit reference to meaning during the round robin may have contributed to their narrow focus of what was important when reading at school.

The children spent more time listening to others reading than they did engaged in reading responses themselves. As the focus children defined reading as the time when they read to the teacher, they may have perceived that they were getting little reading practice. If, as Briar suggested, they were not always tracking as others read then they might have been missing out on a number of learning opportunities during the round robin. All of this provides support for the Ministry's argument to avoid round robin reading during reading groups.

There is, of course, a counter argument. The Ministry of Education (2003) has acknowledged the role of guided reading in responding to the changing skills and needs of individuals. This was clearly one of the reasons that Miss B included reading groups in her programme. The groups provided her with the opportunity to hear every child read every day, so that she could adjust the level of material they were working with and alter the composition of groups as individual children progressed. The heavy use of skips and delayed responses that were not evident during chorusing would have made it much more difficult to determine how children were progressing without the individual reading that is characteristic of the round robin. Miss B also provided a lot of individual praise and corrective feedback during the round robin and was able to prompt children as and when they required assistance. In addition, children's responses during discussion of the book may not have revealed strengths and weaknesses in particular skills and strategies that became evident when children read to her.

The invisibility of errors during other phases of reading group is a strong argument for hearing each child read. Errors, if they remain undetected, may be repeated and learned instead of correct responses (Church, 1999). In addition, Church stresses that "additional instructional time is required to 'unlearn' (errors)" (p. 26). Furthermore, if error rates are high, children may become less motivated to practise reading. Early detection of errors, in contrast, reduces the likelihood that errors will be practised and

ensures that appropriate scaffolds are provided, or levels of challenge are adjusted immediately. Undetected errors are more commonly associated with unsupervised activities, but in the very public reading group task, the children in my study were managing to keep their errors invisible, even when they were working closely with the teacher.

The argument that round robin reading may contribute to boredom is certainly valid, and is consistent with the children indicating that they did not necessarily focus on the text when they were not reading aloud. Briar had clearly stated that she preferred reading when she got more turns. Generally, however, the texts that the children were engaging with in Room 1 were short, so there was little time to be bored. The combined time for children reading during the round robin, including corrections, typically totalled less than 90 seconds in their first weeks at school. The time taken to read the texts appeared to be increasing as the children progressed to more difficult books though, with the time increasing to over three minutes during three of the final four observation sessions. There was also an expectation that the children were focused on the text and could respond whenever they were selected to read, as there were infrequent occasions (two during the observation period) when they were called to read out of sequence.

A final point to consider is the public nature of reading responses in the context of the round robin. Children may have provided models for their peers if a group was functioning well, and there was some evidence to suggest that this might have been the case. If modelling contributed to positive learning outcomes then this incidental form of prompting would be beneficial. However, it was not clear whether children were always using models appropriately. While the children glanced at one another's books it is not clear whether they benefited from this behaviour, or whether they were following the text at all. There was some evidence that the children did not always use verbal models effectively during round robin reading, as Bomber and Briar repeated errors that other children had made on a number of occasions.

The other aspect of public performance to keep in mind might be the degree of risk in exposing strengths and weaknesses. Correct and error responses were obvious to the

whole group, in contrast to chorusing. Briar's preference for smaller reading groups because she got more "turns" might suggest that she was not bothered by the scrutiny of her fellow elephants, but her mother had noticed that when Briar read her school books at home she avoided attempting words if she was not sure what they were. Looking at the way she responded during round robin reading, it is evident that skips and delayed responses almost matched the number of errors she made. Bomber preferred reading school books when he got to take turns, but this seemed to refer to the amount he had to read rather than the public nature of the performance. Once again, the multiple roles of learning to be a reader at the same time as learning to be a learner may interact in ways that may not be the most beneficial for learning to read.

Managing the roles of learner and reader

The data presented in this chapter reveals as much about how children have learned to manage the reading activity itself as it does about how children learned to read. The children's interview responses focused on the importance of "doing" that emphasised the public features of the act of reading rather than the more subtle and deeper aspects of engagement with text. It seems that the children have learned as much about the value of being successful and managing ambiguity and risk as they have about reading.

The way the activity was set up, the teacher's expectations of children's conduct throughout the task and the elements she stressed would have contributed to the task-related beliefs the children had developed. These beliefs, in turn, contributed to the ways children approached the phases of the activity, and to how they defined reading at school in general. Anderson, Stevens et al. (1988) found that clear guidelines and effective management contributed to children learning about "contingencies, control, and competence" (p. 293) that promoted successful outcomes. The children in this study reported positive experiences with respect to group reading, they had a clear understanding of what was expected of them and they were progressing satisfactorily. However, what they identified as the key features of the activity may have limited their deeper understandings of what reading at school is all about. This was, after all, the only activity in which the children believed they were learning to read.

A focus on getting the words right may have led them to disregard aspects of the activity that were equally critical for further reading development. The repeated emphasis on pointing, turning pages and keeping in time may have contributed to this focus on doing the task (reading aloud), while the discussion of the book seemed less significant to the children.

Maintaining the appearance of getting the words right and being a good learner seems to have had an impact on the ways children approach tasks too. The children very quickly developed piloting strategies, which reduced the likelihood that they would make errors. During chorusing the children skipped words and delayed responses, maintaining the image of good learners who were completing the task successfully. During the round robin they repeated what the children before them had said, and hesitated so that the teacher would provide models of correct responses. In only 14 weeks, they had successfully developed a range of strategies that significantly reduced the risk of public errors.

While their reading was informally assessed each day, it may have been that the skills that were developing most significantly were the ones that permitted the children to perform well, rather than to read well. The classroom behaviours we see may not always be what they seem. Dahl (1995) has recognised the ways in which children's voices, revealed through their patterns of engagement during every day activities, provide insights into what they "need and value as learners" (p. 124). She has also provided a cautionary note, suggesting that the classroom behaviours generally visible and audible to observers do not provide an accurate picture of what is happening for children. This was certainly a feature of the academic and social aspects of the classroom in my study.

The children in this study, even when being observed closely, maintained an image of following instructions. Even when Bomber and Briar were performing in the public world of the classroom with the teacher they were still managing their environment so that they appeared to be good students. They moved their fingers across the page, they chorused, read independently and participated in discussions, yet their interview responses and the microanalysis of the classroom reading behaviours reveal that they

were probably as engaged in managing situations as they were in learning. Consider the ways in which both children used delayed responses during reading group. These responses were difficult to detect during chorusing, but even when used during the round robin, they led to successful “reading” performances, which may simply have been the skilful application of imitating. For example, hesitating during the round robin generally resulted in the teacher providing the word a child could not identify, which could be repeated quickly while it was still in working memory. In fact, the children’s delayed responses may have been effectively shaping the teacher’s behaviour.

With little opportunity to read independently, usually only a sentence or two, and a heavy reliance on skips and delayed responses during chorusing, maintaining a successful image as a competent learner contributed to a reduction in the number of genuine reading responses available to the children. This was further compounded by the relatively brief periods in which children engaged in the one activity they understood to be reading.

Was the children’s emphasis on words and sounds an accurate reflection of the instruction provided?

New Zealand classrooms are generally accepted as whole language classrooms. While the New Zealand approach to whole language is regarded as somewhat more pragmatic than whole language approaches in Australia or North America (Nicholson, 2000), it was surprising that the children’s interview responses pointed to a heavily phonics-based programme of instruction. As has been clear throughout the chapter, they highlighted word recognition, beginning letters and sounding out as key strategies when learning to read. Meaning seemed to be something they associated with reading at home, not at school.

The single school activity the focus children identified as reading was one in which they learned phonics-related skills within the context of real reading, which is more typical of a whole language approach. The children were not confused about the

reading instruction they received, but what they perceived to be most important did not necessarily reflect their whole experience. It is understandable that Bomber and Briar's emphasised that reading was about letters and their corresponding sounds. An examination of the reading group activity revealed that Miss B asked children to identify specific words and letters, and beginning sounds during every observation session.

Phonemic and phonological awareness have been acknowledged as strong predictors of early reading success (Adams, 1990; Juel, 1994; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Stanovich, 1986). However, phonological awareness and, more specifically, phonemic awareness are unlikely to develop spontaneously. Adams explains the necessity for teaching in relation to language development. From a very early age children have a "working knowledge" of phonemes, but not at a conscious level. When learning to read, children are faced with the challenge of having to "learn to attend to that which they have learned not to" (p. 66). Therefore, explicit teaching was necessary for children lacking the associated knowledge and skills. When Miss B assessed Bomber and Briar on their familiarity with letter identification soon after school entry they scored 27 and 17 respectively, out of a possible score of 52. Miss B identified them as two of the children who required letter and phonemic awareness instruction, so this was a key feature of their early school experience.

Miss B explicitly taught the children about phonemic awareness on a daily basis. Not only is phonemic awareness a strong predictor of early reading success, but it also contributes to the effectiveness of the sounding out strategies that the children used during their reading homework (Juel, 1994). A familiarity with letters makes it easier to learn letter sounds (Adams, 1990), and there were multiple strategies used in the classroom to promote this (e.g., alphabet frieze, worksheets, letter of the week). The identification of beginning letters was also a regular feature of the daily reading group in all but one of the observations. Identification of letters was usually combined with letter sounds, so that the children's comments about sounding out were also understandable, although it should be noted that sounding out at school focused on beginning letters rather than entire words.

The children's emphasis on word recognition was also reasonable. As well as reading the text aloud, the children's attention was drawn to specific words repeatedly during each observation session. The teacher frequently modelled reading the text for the children as well, so that they recognised this as a significant part of the task. The children appeared to overlook other aspects of reading aloud that were taught and modelled frequently in their time in Room 1. Pacing and intonation were also modelled, but the children did not appear to focus on prosodic features when discussing reading. Perhaps this was, once again, related to the implicit nature of much of the teaching. Word recognition was explicitly referred to while much of the teaching around reading with expression was embedded in the reading act. Miss B had talked of fluency being more than simply than rapid word identification, so this was important from her perspective, but it was only explicitly communicated to the children once, during the final observation session. Kuhn (2003) has commented on the degree of prosody that is characteristic of fluent readers. While the focus children were not fluent readers at the time of the study, an awareness of the importance of intonation, pacing and expression could have impacted on the meaning children took from the text.

The children's emphasis on the more explicit features of their reading group instruction, and the somewhat mechanical aspects of the task (e.g., pointing) suggest that they were learning to "do" reading at the time of the study, rather than being aware of the full range of skills and knowledge they were learning. To take Bomber and Briar's comments at face value was to do them and their teachers an injustice. They were learning much more than their comments implied. For example, the children frequently made accurate predictions about storylines, they focused on reading for the required length of time to complete a story, and they related events in stories to other contexts. When children weren't struggling with unfamiliar words they also responded to bolded text and punctuation marks in an appropriate manner, so that a sense of the importance of expression and interpretation was evident. The children were progressing in a range of reading skill areas, beyond those they identified. However, if the focus children continue to focus on the explicit content while seeking to give the appearance of "good" learners, there is the potential that the implicit skills being taught may be undervalued or disregarded if they are not seen as

necessary for successful performance. There may be long term implications for later reading development if these skills are more critical for more advanced reading.

Chapter Six

“IT’S MORE FUNNER” - READING AT HOME

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the ways in which reading at home shapes, and is shaped by, reading at school. The data used in this chapter is drawn from interviews with the children and their mothers, and the interviews with teachers. Bomber and Briar’s interpretations of their family literacy experiences provided an insight into their broader understandings of what counted as reading, beyond formal reading instruction. The children’s interview responses were, therefore, central to this chapter. Nicky and Lucy’s voices were also critical in this discussion. As the children’s mothers, they have played a key role in determining the range of reading events the children were exposed to as preschoolers.

The chapter begins with a brief description of the children’s everyday literacy experiences during their preschool years, looking at how the children engaged with reading before the introduction of formal instruction. I also identify some of the changes that occurred when the children started school. Two key reading activities, bedtime stories and homework (reading the reading group book to parents), are the focus for the remainder of the chapter. The ways the children engaged in the two types of activity are explored and discussed, using reading events recorded during interviews.

The chapter closes with a presentation of two issues arising from the data. I discuss the status of school reading in relation to the children’s understandings of what counts as reading, and the way the children engaged with different types of reading tasks.

Changes in Briar's life

Before discussing the children's preschool literacy experiences, it is important to acknowledge that Briar's family moved to Oakville less than a month before our first interview. Before moving the family had lived in Yew, a nearby suburb. While this had no obvious impact on her daily family routines, it meant that Briar used some of the community services in Yew rather than using those available in Oakville. Briar's transition to school followed very soon after a series of changes in her living situation. Briar's parents had sold their house, moved in with family members for a few months, and renovated another house in the six months prior to moving to Oakville. They already owned a section near Oakville School, but had not built a house on it at the time of the study.

One of the main reasons for the move to Oakville was Lucy's desire to get into the Oakville school zone. Lucy wanted her daughters to attend a school with a small roll. The two primary schools in Yew had large rolls, so Oakville was an attractive option. As Lucy put it, "'You've got to be a bit more important don't you than, if you're one of even three hundred, as opposed to being one of eight hundred. You think, hopefully, (it'll) make a big difference.'" Lucy had also talked with other families at the Yew kindergarten and they had been very positive about their experiences at Oakville school. The family bought a house in the area so that they were living in the school zone before Briar's fifth birthday, ensuring that she was eligible to attend Oakville School.

Preschool experiences

This section presents the types of reading-related play that Bomber and Briar (and their siblings) frequently engaged in before they started school. I have not closely examined many of the incidental literacy experiences that are part of their everyday lives for two reasons. First, Nicky, Lucy and the children only identified reading as those book-based activities that were deliberately included in the family routine. They did not make clear connections between reading and other activities that did not

involve books, or where book use was not the primary focus (e.g., baking, television programmes, videotapes). This underreporting of everyday reading events seems to reflect Brooker's (2002) notion of invisible pedagogy, which Guthrie and Greaney (1996) have contended occurs because so much family reading occurs "below the threshold of awareness" (p. 69). Many of the everyday literacy events in homes are not deliberate or explicit attempts to introduce reading, and therefore not specifically identified as reading events.

Second, it was impossible to observe the families as they participated in family literacy practices beyond reading events that occurred incidentally during interviews. Family reporting, while not providing a full picture of everyday reading experiences, provided a reasonable account of what counted as reading for these families.

As mentioned earlier, the two preschool reading activities that the children, their mothers and siblings repeatedly identified were both book-based – bedtime stories and library visits. In addition to these activities we briefly discussed some of the games children played when they were preschoolers. The children's kindergarten literacy experiences were also reviewed.

Bedtime stories

All four children in the two focus families have been read to regularly since infancy. There seemed to be a common pattern to events surrounding bedtime reading. The children selected the books they wanted their parents to read to them each night. All four children had personal book collections and bookcases in their bedrooms. Bomber's book collection included a number of books that Tweetie had passed on to him as she "finished with them" as well as his own books. The children often had library books to choose from as well.

Although all four children read a range of books at bedtime during the course of the study, each of the children had longstanding preferences. Bomber's favourite books were about vehicles and he also liked books about animals. He got a number of books

about animals (often non-fiction) out of the library during the course of the study. Briar, Madison, and Tweetie all reported an interest in animal stories, and a preference for fiction. Briar told me that she liked non-fiction in her final interview, particularly stories about animals, but she only read fiction to me during interviews. Four of the six non-school books that Briar read to me during interviews featured animals, so her preference may have related more to subject matter (animals) than to fiction/non-fiction classification.

The children's favourite books appeared to fit gendered patterns commonly found in research studies. Research (e.g., Guthrie & Greaney, 1996; Mohr, 2006; Phillips & McNaughton, 1990) reveals that boys and girls commonly express an interest in books about animals. Boys prefer books about sports, science and transport while girls' selections more commonly feature fantasies or happy stories. Guthrie and Greaney have reported that girls and boys prefer fiction, but that boys show more interest in non-fiction than girls do. Mohr challenged this finding with her study, finding that children in her study expressed a preference for non-fiction. However, it should be noted that in Mohr's study children's preferences were made from a limited selection of books, and that the non-fiction books most children chose featured animals. As with Briar's selection, the animal characters may have been more significant than other aspects of the book.

Although the children selected bedtime stories, their parents took the primary reading role. Bomber's parents divided this activity so that Bomber read with his father and Tweetie read with her mother, each child spending time one-to-one with a parent. Tweetie, Bomber's sister, was in Year 4 at the beginning of the study, and her routine was slightly different to that of the younger children. She spent additional time reading her school book with Nicky, and was allowed to stay up a little later to read chapter books independently.

Bedtime reading appeared to be something of a relaxed affair. (Tweetie told me that her father sometimes fell asleep while reading.) It was also supposed to be fun, with the children and their mothers repeatedly emphasising that they enjoyed reading together. Bomber identified this as a special reading time. Briar, in contrast, only

identified bedtime as a special reading time when prompted by her mother. Briar's mother, Lucy, explained that while bedtime stories were an everyday event, reading was not typically connected to a particular time of the day.

Lucy: We always read before she goes to bed. She failed to tell you that before. But yeah, we do. And she reads quite a bit during the day. It just depends what's sort of happened during the day, but yeah normally.

Briar: We've got a book though, not long. I can still read them.

Lucy: And Briar will normally walk in the bedroom in the morning with a book. Not that she's probably done that in the last month. Well, we've been away. But yeah, for months and months you know, she always walked in the bedroom with a book and we read in the morning. Yeah. Always read to her, always, like right from you know, a baby, I showed her picture books and yeah. My two-year old is book mad as well. She's just nuts on it. She'd have you sitting down all day reading her books.

MC: It's a big thing?

Lucy: Yeah.

MC: So, it's just part of their daily routine?

Lucy: Yeah. They've both got wee bookcases with their own books in their bedrooms and every book would get pulled out every week on a regular basis, wouldn't it, and read to you.

The two focus children had different bedtime rituals. Briar spent the whole time reading, getting her parents to read as many books as she could. Bomber's bedtime routine was not just about reading stories. Bomber and his father often played with puzzles when they had finished reading.

There was a significant gap in the data I collected about the bedtime ritual. I had little information about the types of interactions around reading. (The ways the children read to me, discussed later in this chapter, provided some indication of the nature of the roles they took, but may not accurately reflect interactions with their parents.) It is important to acknowledge the importance of interaction around bedtime stories because it influences children's understandings and reading skills. While reading together has been associated with knowledge of concepts of print, being read *to* has not necessarily been associated with other skills, such as phonological awareness, which are prerequisites for conventional reading (Stuart, Dixon, Masterson & Quinlan, 1998; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2001).

The types of questions parents asked and the degree to which the children were active participants in the story telling would have contributed to the children's understanding of the types of language associated with reading and the purposes of reading (Green, Lilly & Barrett, 2002; Sulzby, 1985). Story telling is a culturally relative activity, with multiple goals and purposes for the participants that contribute to the structure of the activity (Phillips & McNaughton, 1990). Sulzby has acknowledged the significance of child-parent interactions, pointing out that reading together introduces children to "relationships between oral and written language within a social context in which written language is used in a hybridised fashion at first and then gradually takes on its own conventional nature" (p. 459).

Library visits

Bomber and Briar regularly borrowed books from kindergarten library collections. Bomber and Tweetie used the mobile service available to Oakville residents, regularly visiting the library bus to borrow books. Briar used the Yew library, regularly attending story-telling sessions there. These sessions ran from 6.30 to 7.00 pm on Friday evenings, during which librarians read several books to children, often selecting books that the children could not borrow. She seldom borrowed books in the months leading up to the study, using her kindergarten library instead.

While story-telling sessions are often overlooked when discussing reading instruction, it may be important to consider how these may have contributed to Briar's understanding of reading. Fisher (1999) claimed that librarians provide models of positive reading interactions for parents and children. However, the actual reading was only a small part of this event. The story telling was also a special event – it only happened once a week, the family had to travel to the library, and it meant that the children stayed up later than usual in the evening. It had the potential to give reading some status, as an activity that had to be timetabled and was important enough to change the daily routine.

Kindergarten – the children's views

Both children attended kindergarten before starting school. Bomber travelled to a nearby suburb, as there was no local kindergarten. Briar attended a different kindergarten in her old neighbourhood. I asked Bomber and Briar if they learned to read at kindergarten.

Briar responded in the following way:

Briar: Mm. Well, not really.

MC: Oh, so you go to school to learn to read?

Briar: Yup.

MC: So, what do you do at kindy instead?

Briar: You learn how to make stuff and learn how to make telescope and then if you're really good at them then you can even put them on stands and look out...

Later in the interview

Briar: ...they don't learn you how to read books.

MC: Oh. Do they read to you?

Briar: Um. Yip.

MC: And you read by yourself.

Briar: At school you do.

MC: Oh. Do you do any reading at kindy though?

Briar: Mm. Well, well we do different books. We just, well, some of us can read heaps of books.

By the third interview Briar found it difficult to remember what happened at kindergarten.

MC: ...Now I can't remember, I know you went to kindy before you started school. Did you do any sounding out or any reading at kindy?

Briar: No.

MC: None at all? You didn't have any reading time?

Briar: No. I can't remember.

Lucy reminded Briar about reading on the mat, but Briar still did not recall learning to read at kindergarten. She spoke more about having fun at kindergarten. While her comment about the telescope and “making stuff” revealed that she was aware that some teaching and learning was associated with kindy, she did not think that she learned to read until she went to school.

Bomber recalled reading with another child at kindergarten, but he shook his head when asked whether he learned to read there. Nicky talked about mat time, but Bomber did not make clear connections between this activity and reading.

Nicky: Who do you read with at kindy, Bomber?

Bomber: Jake.

Nicky: Jake, do you? Yeah.

MC: Is Jake your friend?

Bomber: He's a boy.

MC: He's a boy like you. And where do you read at kindy?

Bomber: Mm.

MC: Have you got a special place to read at kindy? ...Where do you get the books from?

Bomber: Mm. In the cave.

Both children seemed to remember reading or being read to at kindergarten, but neither recalled learning to read there. Being taught to read was something they associated with going to school. There was one exception to the children's pattern of responses. Bomber had shaken his head to my question on the other occasions when asked if he learned to read at kindergarten, but during the third interview he responded differently:

MC: ...How did you learn to read at kindy?

Bomber: Mm. Mrs J helped me.

MC: Oh. How did she help?

Bomber: Um. Helped me read the words.

MC: Oh, so did you sit together? And did she point at the words?

Bomber: And I said the words.

MC: Oh okay. So you said them after her? Now, that's a good idea. And do you do it the same way at school?

Bomber: Mm, yes.

Bomber's description more accurately described reading instruction observed in the primary classroom than the literacy events his kindergarten teachers had described. However, I do not think that Bomber was muddled when he responded in this way, even though it did not match his teacher's perception of events. His response was clear and confident, and he identified one of his kindergarten teachers by name. Instead, Bomber's answer seemed to reflect the reconstructive nature of memory, as discussed by Nuthall (2000a):

As the details of an experience are forgotten, they can be replaced by the details that a pupil believes should have occurred, based on previous experiences. Knowledge structures, such as schemata, act as "mental templates" which include default information accumulated from previous experiences (p. 22).

Memory is not a precise recollection of events (Nuthall, 2000a, 2000c). Over time details are lost, initially the specific details of events and then the more general features. I had asked Bomber about how he learned to read and he had combined typical features of his current classroom experiences with his knowledge of kindergarten to create a sensible representation of events. Over time this too faded. When I asked about kindergarten experiences in later interviews, Bomber told me that he "just played there."

Kindergarten – the mothers' views

In contrast to their children, Nicky and Lucy both noted reading activities that were provided for the children at kindergarten. They recognised that the types of interactions between teachers and the children contributed to their children learning to read, as illustrated by Nicky's comment:

Nicky: They have like that corner he was telling you about (the cave) where they've got all the books and they have cushions down that they can sit and pick books when they want to. But then they also have a big book area... They have um, like the big books in at mat time at the end of kindy.

MC: Right.

Nicky: Um, I think it's about quarter of an hour. They have mat time and that's when they read a story. And often I'm there and I watch that, and it's quite interactive with them. They'll ask questions and they can put their hands up and mm.

MC: And recite things off?

Nicky: Yes. Yeah.

MC: Oh, okay.

Nicky: And you do signs, don't you? On mat time at kindy.

Kindergarten – the teachers' views

I had the opportunity to talk to three of Bomber's kindergarten teachers who identified a number of features of their programme that were designed to promote the development of reading skills. These included:

- The Letter Land programme - the children worked with a particular letter each week, each of which became the central character in a range of songs and activities. E.g., Harry the Hat man – his letter is *H* and his sound is /h/.
- Rhyming – e.g., matching pictures and getting children to come up with other rhyming words.
- News – newspapers, pictures and advertisements were used to encourage children to talk about events.
- Group stories – teaching concepts about print as well as reading with the children.
- Writing skills – e.g., modelling the direction of movement for children, and talking about uppercase and lowercase letters.
- Letter and word identification – e.g., matching games, underlining exercises and books featuring repetitive passages or words.
- Access to print – e.g., posters, books, and computer games.
- Literacy embedded in teaching – language to support literacy e.g., teaching the concept of opposites when talking about hot air balloons.

The teachers agreed that much of their teaching was embedded within activities, rather than being discrete teaching episodes, but each component was deliberately placed within the programme. The news activity brought common meaningful forms of print from home into the more formal kindergarten setting. Purcell-Gates (1996)

has argued that this use of familiar forms of literacy is something that is likely to promote school success, building on what children already know and are familiar with. However, the implicit nature of the literacy focus meant that children failed to see the value of the activity in relation to reading.

Children chose to participate in most activities during kindergarten sessions, as there were not many whole-group activities. All three teachers noted that Bomber rarely selected reading activities independently. He showed more interest in “physical” play during his time at kindergarten. The pairing of implicit teaching and Bomber’s choice of activities meant that he was less aware of many of the literacy options available to him.

Children’s knowledge of events at kindergarten shapes their expectations, so it is important to consider whether the children and their teachers had similar understandings of reading experiences (Reifel, 1988). Children in my study, as in Reifel’s, viewed play as a common feature of kindergarten (preschool) experiences. If, as their responses suggested, the children thought of many of their activities as play and not learning, they may have missed some of the reading opportunities available by focusing on other, non-reading, aspects of activities. The teachers’ decision to embed reading in the programme meant that much of the reading instruction occurred below the children’s threshold of awareness, in a similar manner to many of the activities at home.

While the children may not have been conscious of the amount of reading within the programme there is little doubt that discourse during play contributed to their understandings of reading (Farquhar, 2003). Kindergarten routines have also been found to provide general scripts that guide the children’s behaviour when they reach school (Fivush, 1984). Activities like shared reading, although often less structured than similar events in primary classrooms, have enough features in common to allow children to fit in as they begin formal instruction.

The teachers’ emphasis on literacy embedded within the holistic approach of Te Whaariki appeared to reflect the teaching beliefs commonly found in New Zealand kindergartens (Farquhar, 2003; McLachlan-Smith & St. George, 2000). The notion of

emergent literacy and emergent learning were central features of Bomber's kindergarten experiences, just as they were important in his primary classroom. Kindergarten teachers actively provided reading connections with home through kindergarten libraries (this was also a feature of Briar's kindergarten), and talked about encouraging children to develop reading skills rather than waiting until children were "ready". Yet, despite their active role in teaching children to read, the focus children did not see kindergarten as a place where they learned to read. Kindergarten was more about play than about learning.

Formal reading instruction

Neither Nicky nor Lucy deliberately taught their children to read before school entry. However, there was some evidence of incidental and invisible pedagogy in both homes throughout the study, with fridge magnets, magazines, crayons and other items scattered about living rooms and kitchens. Library visits, drawing, shared reading and the other experiences with print were introduced within the context of play rather than being intentional learning exercises. Nicky and Lucy made deliberate decisions not to provide any formal instruction at home for their preschoolers with one exception - Lucy had spent time helping Briar write her name as her fifth birthday approached. Both mothers commented that reading should always be about having fun before children start school. For example:

Nicky:

MC: ...So, in terms of Bomber's reading, you haven't kind of formally taught him to read or anything-

Nicky: No.

MC: before he's gone to school?

Nicky: No, no. I haven't done anything like, I don't know if we did that with Tweetie either really. It was more just oh, he's, what was it with Bomber is, um, like cards. He likes sight cards, with like the picture on the front and the word on the back. And we'll sometimes do that with him. And we have a scrabble word game for, junior scrabble.

MC: Oh, yeah.

Nicky: And that's quite a good one for just, they pick out the right one that fits and that spells the word. And he likes doing that actually.

- MC: And that's just fun and games?
- N: Yes.
- MC: It's not-
- N: Yes, yeah, rather than, I don't do anything like formally like that. No, no.
- MC: So that's, I mean, that's where you see school kind of coming in to it?
- N: Yes, yeah. If you want to. I just sort of feel that the reading of the books is a good, yeah, teaching them to learn really.

Lucy:

- MC: ... So, with her reading and things you haven't taught her? It's just the reading with her and you haven't kind of done any of the formal stuff?
- Lucy: No, not really, no. Figured that yeah, we'll just sort of, yeah it's more of a school thing, yeah. Isn't it.
- MC: So it's been kind of that fun time and story-
- Lucy: Haven't really sat down and yeah, said well this is that word. Yeah. Probably about the only word she'd really recognise is her name.
- MC: It will be interesting to see what happens then?
- Lucy: Yeah. I think, you know, it won't take a lot, you know, when she is, does get into it. I think she'll pick it up quickly. I'd be very surprised if she did struggle with her reading.
- MC: Mm.
- Lucy: But you never know, mm. You know, she is really interested and she loves drawing and you know, she's just, just that sort of, it will keep her attention sort of for hours and hours. You know, drawing and books.
- MC: So she concentrates for long periods?
- Lucy: She concentrates very well, yeah.

Nicky and Lucy indicated that although they did not teach their children, the type of play they engaged in was important preparation for school. They both identified skills required for positive outcomes in school settings. Nicky commented that reading with children was "teaching them to learn" and Lucy made explicit reference to interest and attention. What they were offering were repeated opportunities to engage with print in meaningful ways, something that is critical for early literacy development (Gallimore & Goldenberg, 1993).

Fun and games

Lucy and I did not talk in depth about any reading-related games that she consciously engaged Briar in. She did talk about how much Briar enjoyed reading and drawing though, as mentioned above. Briar identified the video player as another literacy tool in the house when I asked her how she had learned the alphabet song commonly associated with *Sesame Street*.

MC: She knew the alphabet song.

Lucy: Yeah.

MC: Is that from music or is that from watching videos?

Briar: Well we learn it all the time with videos.

(Interestingly, Briar pronounced the ‘z’ as zed, rather than the zee more commonly heard on *Sesame Street* videotapes.)

Bomber spent “some” time drawing and a “little” time writing as a preschooler, but seemed more interested in outdoor activities. When he played indoors he often played with the computer, his cars, his train set, or his puzzles. Nicky deliberately introduced an educational component to some of these leisure activities, particularly games. When she selected games for Bomber, she looked for those with both educational benefits and a fun factor. This was particularly evident when Nicky talked about computer software:

Nicky: I’ve got Reader Rabbit and I’ve got a maths Reader Rabbit and we’ve also got spelling force.

MC: Oh, okay.

Nicky: So he does, they’re all educational ones that he does on them, yeah.

MC: Oh, right. So, he just potters away on his own with those?

Nicky: Yes. Yeah. I can leave him with Reader Rabbit and the maths one. And he can do them. I mean, they’re like a game, but I think they’re still educational as well, those ones. Those programmes.

MC: A double purpose really?

Nicky: It is. Yeah, yeah. That’s right.

Tweetie’s favourite game at the beginning of the study was playing schools with Bomber. As the teacher in this game, Tweetie taught Bomber about reading as well as

introducing him to some of the realities of being in a classroom. Bomber had a special school book and Tweetie set him work to complete. The children showed this book to me, and I noted that much of the work was “marked” by Tweetie, Nicky or Bomber’s father, Andy. Although this feedback was provided within the context of a game, it revealed that Bomber’s parents did, perhaps unintentionally, provide some formal instruction after all.

It is important to acknowledge that Bomber and Briar’s understandings of reading did not suddenly emerge when they began school. The data exposed a small number of the everyday literacy events that were embedded in the daily lives of the focus families and have contributed to understandings of reading since infancy. When Bomber and Briar entered school they brought five years of preschool literacy experiences with them. The range of unreported activities that the children engaged in was likely to have been considerable too. As Heath (2000) observed, “ways of taking from books are as much a type of learned behaviour as are ways of eating, sitting, playing games and building houses” (p. 33). Equally important is that the children in my study learned about books as they participated *in* each of the activities mentioned above.

Simply having books and other literacy materials in their homes would not have been enough to support literacy development (Spiegel, 1994). The nature of the interactions around these resources was the key to the children’s developing skills and knowledge that could then be applied in the school context (Biddulph, Biddulph & Biddulph, 2003; Wasik, Dobbins & Herrman, 2001). The ways in which children learn to take meaning from text, and the multiple ways in which they learn to use it is important (Biddulph et al, 2003; Heath, 2000). Wasik et al. challenge teachers and researchers to focus on parental strengths, rather than deficit models, and emphasise the role story reading can play in scaffolding and support. It should also be remembered that this interaction is a partnership, so that bedtime reading is not only important in terms of teaching concepts about print as parents model how to read a book, but also in the role children play in the reading act too (Biddulph et al., 2003).

Children's parents and siblings were the most immediate influences during this time, as they regulated the day-to-day literacy experiences of young children and controlled access to many of the reading experiences the children engaged in. The focus children themselves also initiated reading events, as was evident in Lucy's earlier comment about Briar and Madison asking for stories. This self-initiation was a feature of family literacy revealed in Gallimore and Goldenberg's (1993) research, supporting Auerbach's (1993) claim that family literacy practices were often a case of "you scratch my back, I scratch yours" (p. 171). These findings challenge the common assumption that the "natural" direction of literacy learning is adult to child. Phillips and McNaughton (1990) found that children initiated more reading events than their parents, something that was critical for "laissez-faire" families in Gallimore and Goldenberg's studies. Once again, the child's role as an active learner contributes to how they learn to read as they shape adults' behaviours.

During their preschool years the children's understanding of what it was to be a reader, and the role of school in learning to become a competent reader had developed and evolved. Before beginning school both children told me that they could read. They also told me that they were going to school to learn to read. Neither of them appeared to see any contradiction in their statements. Lucy described Briar's preschool reading as "summing up" familiar books, acknowledging her pre-conventional or pseudo-reading, rather than dismissing it as not being reading. Her view of reading appeared to be consistent with the notion of emergent reading that underpins reading instruction in New Zealand.

Changes that occurred as a result of school entry

Neither family reported significant changes to their family routines upon school entry. The children continued to have bedtime stories and visit the library, although there were fewer trips to the library.

Tweetie was disappointed about one change in her play routine. Bomber no longer wanted to play schools with her now that he was actually going to school. The

children perceived this as a minor change in the games they played together, and in terms of their daily routine it did not appear to be significant. However, it is important to consider the number of experiences this activity had provided for Bomber and Tweetie, both in terms of learning and consolidating reading skills and in defining the roles of teachers and learners. Bomber generally preferred outdoor activities to indoor games, so this had been a useful way of providing reading opportunities in an entertaining and informal manner.

The major change the children and their mothers noted was the introduction of reading homework to their daily routine. The reading group component of this activity was explored in the school context in the previous chapter. I will now consider how this activity has impacted on children's reading in their home environment.

Reading as a homework activity

Children were given a book to take home during reading group (including pre-entry visits). Once the focus children started school this became a regular homework activity. On their first day at school each child was provided with a copy of the R.E.A.D. I.T. book. (Refer to Appendix 4.) The R.E.A.D. I.T. book functioned as a reading log, with each book the child read dated and recorded. Parents were also asked to write a comment about on the child's reading each day, and children were asked to fill in a blank face to indicate how they had felt about the book. (Happy, sad or anything in-between.)

The introduction of this activity led to changes in the way that the children read with their parents. As mentioned earlier, reading had been a relaxed event in both families before the children started school, with children choosing books and parents reading to them. The homework task was a much more focused and structured event with a specific book being read by the children and their parents taking the role of teacher/facilitator much more explicitly. New expectations accompanied the change in roles. As preschoolers, the children had chosen if and when they read. As school children they continued to do this for other reading events, but parents dictated homework times, the teacher determined the book selection and the children were

expected to read entire books accurately. The children acknowledged this shift themselves when talking about important features of reading activities:

- MC: So, what's more important? Reading all the words or telling the story?
- Briar: Telling the story.
- MC: Okay. So that's more important with your books at home? What about the school ones? Is telling the story-
- Briar: Reading.
- MC: more important?
- Briar: Reading.
- MC: Reading the words? Why do you think it's different?
- Briar: Mm. 'Cause there's hundred of people.
- MC: Oh. So it's 'cause you're doing it with all the other people?
- Briar: Mm. Uh huh.

Briar's reference to "hundred of people" implied that she was talking about reading at school, but she applied the same rules when reading her reading group book at home.

There was a clear expectation from the children's parents during interviews that they would correctly identify the text on the page. When the children read non-school books to me they were allowed to read however they wished, but things changed when it came to school books. School reading was not just about having fun; it was about learning to read and it was a serious business. Nicky and Lucy prompted the children, sometimes in subtle ways, so that the act of reading a school book became a much more structured and formal task. For example,

- Briar: Are these the words? I can read it.
- Lucy: You go over and sit over by Michelle and read it properly. Like you would to Mum.

Briar was only prompted to sit nicely when we were reading her school books, not when we read books from her personal collection or her library books. Bomber read to me less frequently, but when he read a school book to me during the third interview, Nicky prompted him as he read, as she did when Bomber did his homework reading. When Bomber read non-school books, he was not prompted at all. The following illustrates the nature of the prompting.

Bomber: Mummy.

Nicky: Mm hm.

Bomber: What does that say? I don't know.

Nicky: What does it say there?

Bomber: I.

Nicky: What's that word?

Bomber: Can.

Nicky: I -. No. I - it starts with 's'. I -. Something that you do.

Bomber: Mm.

Nicky: I /s/, /swi/, what is it?

Bomber: Swim.

Nicky: That's right.

The previous example reveals how the parents' roles changed with the introduction of homework reading as well. Nicky and Lucy told me that they now monitored their children's reading closely and found themselves taking more of a teaching role. There was some sense that this role was only taken when working with school books though. As noted above, the corrections and prompts that accompanied school book reading during interviews were not evident when we read non-school books.

Nicky and Lucy consistently talked about correcting errors by sounding out difficult words. They did not appear to be using the full range of hints for assisting their children to read that were provided in the R.E.A.D. I.T. book, relying instead on their own experience. For example, the R.E.A.D. I.T. book listed several strategies for approaching an unknown word (e.g., *swim* in the example above):

- "What do you think the word is?"
- "Read the sentence again and see if you can work it out."
- "Have a go."
- "Look at the picture."
- "What does it start with?"

The children talked about the importance of getting words right when reading, and how sounding out was helpful when they got stuck, so this seemed to be a key feature of homework reading for both of them.

The homework activity became the priority reading activity, dominating other reading opportunities. The bedtime story was still a regular feature of the children's home routine, but both mothers acknowledged that homework had become the focus of reading at home. For example, if Briar was struggling with her reading group book during the afternoon then she repeated it to provide additional practice.

- MC: ...So she's still got her favourites [books]?
- Lucy: Oh, yeah. Well, we mainly concentrate on the school books now. Yeah. If there's anything to be read, it's generally the school books, but yeah. One of those books.
- MC: Yeah. So she does that, kind of after school or at night or-
- Lucy: Um, yeah she does. Depending on how she goes with it. But I think if it's like trickier we'll do it you know, a few times with her. It's not all in a row. We'll do it, you know, over the course of the night. Yeah. Then, um, if she's still struggling we'll get up in and do it in the morning.

Bomber's school reading sometimes encroached directly onto his reading with his father. Nicky was talking about helping him to recognise beginning sounds when he was struggling with a particular words in school books:

- Nicky: And Andy does too, when he does the reading with him at night. The two of us, yeah, one or other.
- MC: So you tend to, are you still doing the kind of -
- Nicky: Take turns
- MC: -home work thing?
- Nicky: Yeah, no we take turns. I'll do reading sometimes when he gets home from school with him. And then Andy'll do it again at night.
- MC: Oh okay.
- Nicky: So sometimes he'll read it again twice, all depending on what time we've got, you know, after school. Or else I might do it at night with him and Andy'll do Tweetie. Yeah, we just sort of take turns really.

The homework task sometimes impacted on bedtime reading. Briar's parents encouraged her to read her reading group book to them at bedtime on occasions when she experienced difficulty with a particular text earlier in the day. Bomber sometimes read his book to his father at bedtime. The more formal pattern of the homework activity became a part of the usually relaxed bedtime reading on these occasions.

Homework - match or mismatch?

The more formal nature of the homework reading and the distinctions Bomber and Briar made between home reading and school reading led me to focus on the way the children and their parents had interpreted Miss B's aims for the homework task.

Miss B's aims

Miss B had several aims for the homework reading. She was anxious that homework reading should be an enjoyable time for parents and children, rather than a stressful activity:

Miss B: Sometimes there are some children and you think "Oh I hope that's going to be a good experience at home." Instead of Mum and Dad "Sit down, read this. We've got to do this." You know making it, turning it into a negative instead of a positive.

MC: So being enjoyable and getting the practice, combined is –

Miss B: Yeah is the key I think. But then there's the odd one, a parent, and you just can tell from the parent's attitude possibly that um, it's not going to be a good experience.

MC: Yeah. And that has huge implications in terms of –

Miss B: And they put huge pressure on the child, "Why don't you know that word?" Like this.

Miss B also hoped that the homework task would provide opportunities to practise reading, beyond those offered in school time. She talked about this in terms of word recognition, comprehension and fluency:

MC: So the home reading is as important in terms of the children getting the skills on board?

Miss B: Well it gives them the extra mileage because you see the reading group on the mat once, there might be six children on the mat. And they all get a turn at reading a page each, orally, within the group. And you can focus on what's happening there, but they don't necessarily get a chance to read the whole book so they're just, um – it's good practice for them to go home and read, again. And it just helps to build up the knowledge of the high-frequency words and it just builds up fluency levels. Because if you read, the first time they read a book, they tend to be a bit more static and tend to read word by word, initially at the very early stages. But if they go home and read

the book again, the second time round they know it a little bit better and so they build up the pace of the reading and it becomes a little bit more fluent and it starts, it just –

MC: Fluency in terms of comprehension rather than just -?

Miss B: Yes, yes. So they're not just focusing on decoding then they're starting to get into the old silent reading and comprehension. I mean, we encourage that anyway.

Finally, Miss B expected the combination of the task itself and the R.E.A.D. I.T. logs to establish a line of communication between home and school. She hoped that parents could get a sense of how their children were progressing and some idea of what they were doing at school. She also hoped that parents would use the R.E.A.D. I.T. books effectively so that they could assist their children during reading (following the advice in the book about reading together) and provide Miss B with feedback (by filling in a comments column). Miss B also believed that the introduction of the R.E.A.D. I.T. reading log had increased the degree of accountability for parents providing children with practice. She began by talking about the focus children's progress:

Miss B: I mean they've worked well. And they've both got very good home backgrounds –

MC: Mm. And that makes a difference?

Miss B: Yes, yes. Very supportive parents and they do the reading at home at night and they follow the book. I don't know. Have you seen our yellow books that they take home? That give guidelines for the parents.

MC: Mm.

Miss B: Yes. They're very useful for parents and find they're quite helpful. Previously to having those books we used to just send the reading book home every night and there were always a certain number of parents who just didn't take the time to sit down and read with the children. But now they've got the book they actually have to write in it.

Miss B also trusted the parents of the children in her class. In her words, “And good parents always tend to do the right things anyway. It just comes naturally.”

Nicky and Lucy's interpretations of the purposes of homework reading

Nicky and Lucy stressed, once again, the importance of their children enjoying reading or being interested in reading to their parents. Nicky talked about this in relation to two aspects of the homework task, the book and the high frequency word cards:

Nicky: Yeah. That he brings home every night. But, he actually really enjoys doing this. And you can see the envelope as well. That's his words he brings home.

MC: Yeah.

Nicky: And he loves sitting up at the bench and putting them together in sentences.

MC: Oh, okay.

Nicky: Mm. I find that's something he really enjoys doing. That, and I think that's where he's learning them from, you know.

Later in the same interview, talking about Bomber reading books to his parents

Nicky: ...To try to help him that way. He said, yeah. But I think he's really coming on with it at the moment. Yeah...He's enjoying it.

MC: Oh, that's good.

Nicky: Which is the big thing. About it. Yeah. Yeah, he's keen to do it.

The priority given to reading homework, discussed earlier, suggests that both sets of parents felt a degree of accountability for completing the task each day. (This accountability was not directly related to the responsibility of filling in the R.E.A.D. I.T. log.) The children often read their books more than once so they also ensured that Bomber and Briar got additional practice, particularly with books the children found difficult.

The R.E.A.D. I.T. logs offered some insights into the amount of reading practice the focus children got at home, and the aspects of reading that were important to their mothers. Both logs appeared to provide a fairly accurate record of the books the children had actually read. Bomber's log was incomplete, but the blank spaces appeared to coincide with absences from school. An examination of the handwriting in the logs suggests that both parents regularly wrote in Bomber's R.E.A.D. I.T. reading log, while Lucy filled in Briar's book on all but four occasions.

The focus families did not simply use the R.E.A.D. I.T. reading logs to keep track of the books the children were reading. They had consistently written about the children's reading in comments column as well. Comments generally fell under five broad headings that focused on different dimensions of the task:

- Enjoyment during task – e.g., enjoyed reading this book.
- General quality of reading - e.g., well done. Good reading.
- Enjoyment and quality – e.g., Read well with plenty of enthusiasm
- Specific errors identified – e.g., read it well apart from the name Aja.
- Specific skills identified – e.g., trying to sound out harder words.

The frequency with which parents used each type of comment is summarised in Table 13. The value placed on children enjoying reading is evident, with comments specifically focussing on enjoyment accounting for 14.5 per cent of the comments written in Bomber's log, and 19.1 per cent in Briar's log. In addition, 12.0 per cent of the comments in Bomber's log and 14.3 per cent of the comments in Briar's log included reference to both enjoyment and the quality of the children's reading. In total, 26.5 per cent of the comments made in Bomber's log and 33.4 per cent in Briar's including some reference to enjoyment. Specific reference to the quality of the children's reading was made in an additional 44.6 per cent of comments in Bomber's log, and 27.6 per cent of Briar's log. Therefore, comments highlighting the quality of the children's reading accounted for a total of 55.6 per cent and 41.9 per cent of comments respectively. Comments about the general quality of the children's reading provided Miss B with some information about how the children were managing with the books she sent home, and whether they were working with material at an appropriate level.

Table 13

Percentage of Types of Parental Comments Recorded in R.E.A.D. I.T. Books

Type of comment	Bomber	Briar
Enjoyment during task	14.5	19.1
Enjoyment and quality	12.0	14.3
General quality of reading	44.6	27.6
Specific skills identified	12.0	35.2
Specific errors identified	16.9	3.8

The notable difference between the families that is evident in Table 13 was the reporting of specific errors and skills. Lucy reported these approximately 10 per cent more often than Bomber's parents. While Bomber's parents reported errors slightly more often than they reported Bomber's skills, Lucy reported almost 10 times as many skills as she did errors. Lucy also identified a broader range of skills and errors than Nicky and Andy.

Miss B had clearly identified her desire for reading to be enjoyable, she had stressed the importance of practice, and she had expressed a desire for feedback from the children's parents. From her perspective the reporting of how much children enjoyed the activity and the specific errors and skills demonstrated during the homework task were probably the most helpful. As well as revealing some of the errors being made during homework reading, the feedback identified some of the errors that were hidden during the classroom reading. Miss B's anxiety that the task might become a "negative" experience would no doubt have been reduced with comments like "keen to read" and "I read this book 10 times". In addition, infrequent comments like "very very tired tonight! Still managed to read most of it..." and "...grumpy boy tonite" provided a sense that the parental comments were genuine, rather than a sanitised version of events.

Something that was important in terms of the number of reading practice opportunities the children had (but is not evident in Table 13) was that, despite starting school two weeks after Bomber, Briar had read 22 more books at the end of the school year. (According to their entry dates Bomber should have read 10 more books than Briar.) Absences, rather than a lack of homework reading, appear to explain the difference in the number of books the two children read. What this difference has meant, in terms of reading, is that Briar has had the opportunity to engage with school texts on many more occasions than Bomber. In addition, Bomber's interests meant that during leisure time he was less likely to engage in reading activities, so that during his absences from school he was missing out on multiple experiences with reading-related material. The homework activity was one way in which to ensure that children practised reading every day. Absences had a

negative impact on this, and meant that Briar had four weeks of homework reading practice that Bomber missed out on.

The children's interpretations of the homework task

The children did not make many direct references to the homework task. Bomber made a distinction between school books and home books, classifying school books as things to read and other books being stories or sources of information. He then talked about why he completed the homework task before Tweetie talked about why homework was important:

MC: Why do you read the books you read with Dad?

Bomber: Um, because I want the stuff afterwards.

MC: Mm. So the books from school are kind of like learning to read ones, and the ones at home are to find out things and have stories? That's interesting. What were you going to say, Tweetie?

Tweetie: That um, that the book that you read at, like, you read books at school and then you read books at home that help you to be um, to be a better reader. Like um, reading at home.

MC: How come?

Tweetie: Because of school makes you um, learn better reading.

MC: Oh, okay. So you read them again? So, it's a bit like when you learn a sport I guess. Is it like practising?

Tweetie: Mm.

Bomber's response indicated that his parents, perhaps unintentionally, had brought Premack's rule into play. Premack's rule is associated with behavioural theories (Schunk, 2004), and is the deliberate arrangement of events so that "any activity which the learner prefers to engage in can be used to reinforce completion of any less preferred activity" (Church, 1999, p. 31). It is important to point out that Bomber did not dislike the homework reading task, and that his parents did not have any trouble getting him to complete the task. However, it was not one of his favourite activities. Bomber's parents encouraged him to do his homework by making sure that it was followed by one of his favourite activities, bedtime reading with his father. Bomber acknowledged that after he read his school book he got the "stuff" he wanted.

Although the comments in the R.E.A.D. I.T. book indicated that Bomber enjoyed the homework task, he clearly enjoyed the bedtime reading and puzzles more.

Tweetie's comments about homework, in contrast, seemed to be hinting at the importance of practice, rather than access to enjoyable activities. Given that she is three years older, this may well be a developmental difference. Tweetie was a more experienced reader and used reading at school, and possibly at home, in more complex ways than her younger brother.

The focus children made additional distinctions between school reading and home reading. Bomber repeatedly told me that he had a much greater amount of choice with non-school related reading, identifying this as a difference between reading at home and reading at school during four of the six interviews. On three occasions he indicated that reading at home was better because he got to choose which books to read, and on the other he referred to getting to choose when it was his turn to read. At bedtime he got to decide if and when he wanted to read, and he let Andy do most of the reading.

Both children stressed the importance of getting the words right when reading school books. Their comments appeared to mirror those made by children in Michel's (1994) study. The most startling comment Michel uses to introduce discussion of the impact of schooling on children's understanding is that of a six-year old, Amy, who reported, "I used to think reading was making sense of a story, but now I know it's just letters" (p. 2). Such comments effectively reduced reading to a letter-by-letter or word-by-word identification task. However, neither of the focus children in this study appeared to have such limited views of reading, although there was some sense of context-bound elements to their descriptions of reading. Bomber, for example, used reading to find out things at home, but did not associate this type of reading with school activities. Miss B had introduced children to early researching skills, and there were reference books scattered in the classroom when children were working on particular topics (e.g., caterpillars and butterflies), so it is likely that Bomber was using these skills in a range of curriculum areas, but not seeing them as directly related to learning to read.

Briar's statement about the importance of getting words correct was consistent over the period of the study. However, she firmly stated that telling the story continued to be most important at home, so she did not see reading simply as a word identification activity. The type of activity she was engaged in, homework or leisure reading, made a difference to what she viewed as the principal focus of the task. Her explanations for getting the words right at school varied over time. Initially she could not explain – "I just have to." By the third interview Briar thought, as is evident in the earlier quote, that this precision was necessary because of the "hundred of people" at school. Her final reason for telling the story rather than the words being critical at home was because of the level of difficulty of some of the books – books at home were "hard and easy." School books were "easy."

What became clear was that, while both children enjoyed their reading homework, it was seen as a required and monitored task and served a different purpose to their leisure reading.

How the children read aloud during interviews

While the children provided little information about their understanding of the homework task directly, they both read to me repeatedly throughout the study. There were clear differences in the way they shared books from home and books from school, particularly in the earlier interviews. The two children read their school books in similar ways to one another, but they read their own books quite differently.

Bomber

Nicky suggested that Bomber share one of his favourite books with me during our first interview, and reading became a part of all but one of our interviews following that. During the final interview Bomber selected two books to read. He read two pages of a school book and then a picture book. The books he chose to read fell into four distinct categories: school books (2), picture books with little text (2), picture books with repetition (1) and non-fiction (1).

School books

Bomber pointed to each word and asked for help several times. He read slowly and hesitated repeatedly on both occasions that he read school books to me. Although Bomber was reading to me during interviews, Nicky took an active teaching role when he was reading his school books or worksheets. The types of prompts and praise Nicky provided when Bomber read his school books provided some anecdotal evidence of the types of interaction around homework reading. The following transcript illustrates the ways Bomber read school books during interviews.

Bomber: I can swim said the dolphin.

Nicky: Good boy. Do you know what those things there are? Can you remember?

Bomber: Speech marks.

Nicky: That's right. Good boy.

Bomber: I can swim said the polar bear.

Nicky: Good boy.

Bomber: I can swim said the. I don't know that word.

Nicky: Begins with *s*.

Bomber: Seal.

Nicky: Sea, what's that word?

Bomber: Mm. Seal.

Nicky: No, that's an *h*. Hor. Sea-

Bomber: Horse.

Nicky: Horse. That's right.

MC: Oh, well done, Bomber.

Bomber: Can?

Nicky: Mm hm. Can.

Bomber: You.

Nicky: You. Good boy.

Bomber: Mm.

Nicky: What's that word?

Bomber: Have I got that word?

Nicky: [*Looking at high frequency cards.*] I don't know if you've got it in here, have you?

That says yes.

Bomber: Yes. I-

Nicky: Yes, yes.

Bomber: -can said the lady. I can swim too

Non-school books

Bomber read these books quite differently during the earlier interviews. He turned pages and pointed to pictures or manipulated moveable sections in the books. The only text he read were the numbers that appeared on the pages of a counting book. Bomber selected two more complex books during the study. One was a library book about guinea pigs. The text was above his reading level, but he pointed to numbers and read them to me, telling me how many pages were in each section of the book. After we had turned the tape recorder off he talked about guinea pigs in a general sense, but did not actually read the text. Nicky took a much less active role when Bomber was reading non-school books, with very little scaffolding or structuring of the event.

During the final interview Bomber selected a long-standing favourite picture book, *Sniff – Snuff – Snap!* (Dodd, 1997). Bomber recited the text quickly and confidently, without pointing, and with humour. He misread a small number of words (*still*, *baboon*, *astride*, *cool*) but otherwise read the text word for word. The pace at which he read and turned the pages contrasted with the stilted and hesitant way that he read the unfamiliar school book earlier in the same interview. Bomber's reading skills had certainly developed since his first interview, but I suspect that his memory and familiarity with the text, as well as his improved reading skills, were responsible for the quality of his performance.

Briar

Briar was always eager to read to me. She read to me during every interview, only limiting herself to a single book on one occasion. She even got additional stories to read after we turned the tape recorder off at the end of the final interview. Lucy initiated book reading during the first interview and Briar initiated reading events in every interview that followed. Briar often selected books that were above her reading level, choosing favourite books rather than those she found easy to read. Her selection was different from Bomber's. She chose school books (3), picture books with text (4), and collections of stories (2).

School books

Briar's reading of school books bore similarities to Bomber's. She attempted to read every word during interview two without seeking assistance:

- Briar: It has windows with window wipers. It has a steering wheel. It has lights.
 MC: It has lights. Yeah.
 Briar: It has a roof with a bag. Look at
 MC: I think we missed a page.
 Briar: No.
 MC: Yeah. After the roof rack page, I think. There's another one hiding there. Look at that.
 B: It has a trailer with a boat. Look at my red car.

After Briar had finished reading, Lucy commented on the level of difficulty of the text. Briar had misread *windscreen wipers* ("window wipers") and *roof rack* ("roof with a bag"), but Lucy was not worried about these types of errors. She commented on the window wipers error specifically, saying, "She was just calling them wipers and not windscreen wipers. I mean, you can't expect her to, can you?" Lucy did correct high frequency word errors, or repeated errors that Briar made though:

- Briar: To, at.
 Lucy: She always says "to" for that word. It, it.
 Briar: It.

Briar's reading changed over the period of the study. During interview three Briar tried beginning sounds of words when she got stuck or hesitated, looking to me for assistance. She read stories straight through with few, if any comments about the story. By interview four she read her school book quickly and confidently, with little hesitation and no errors, and talked about the story after she finished reading.

Non-school books

Lucy did not correct Briar at all when she read non-school books. Briar read a number of her favourite books to me during the study. *Kitten's Adventure* (Coxon, 2002) was her favourite book throughout the study and she read it to me on two occasions.

During the first interview Briar told me that she could read this book and “read” the story by summarising the text. (As noted earlier, Lucy reported that this was common practice.) During the second interview, after six weeks at school, Briar took a different approach initially. She began by telling me that she couldn’t read the book, having just read her school book. When she began reading she asked me to identify words for her:

- Briar: I can’t read these books yet. I’m just trying to read them.
 MC: Oh, okay.
 Briar: Kitten’s Adventure.
 MC: But you can read Kitten’s Adventure, can’t you?
 Briar: Yes, I can read some books.
 MC: Oh, okay. You read this one to me last time. Great.
 Briar: Kitten’s Adventure. Wake up sleepyhead. Wake up, wake it. What does that say?
 MC: You tell me.
 Briar: Wake up.
 MC: That says Bonny.
 Briar: Bonny. What does that say?
 MC: Well how do you normally read that book? Could you show me how you normally read it, do you read each word or do you just, or do you just tell me about the story?
 Briar: Oh, I read it and Bonny. What does that say?
 MC: Bonny was bored.
 Briar: Bonny was bored.
 MC: So what does she do?
 Briar: Bonny looked up. She saw, Bonny, what’s that say?
 MC: That one says ‘it’.
 Briar: It was /c/. It was Bonny.
 MC: Time
 Briar: time to get
 MC: What’s she going to go on? A big ad
 Briar: venture.
 MC: That’s right.

At this point Briar turned the page and began telling the story rather than trying to read the words correctly, continuing to do this for the remainder of that book and the one she read following this. On every other occasion Briar read non-school books by summarising the text if it was too difficult for her, or reading accurately as her reading skills improved. There was a clear change over time, with Briar’s pseudo-

reading being replaced by conventional reading as she became more skilled.

Whenever she read non-school books Briar frequently made asides as she read, without losing her place. She consistently read rapidly and with expression.

While both children made clear distinctions between the ways they read school books and non-school books, the most obvious differences were in the ways the two children read non-school books and the selections they made. Bomber was more self-conscious and may have been less comfortable performing in front of me, but it is more likely that the major contributing factors were the amount of reading the two children did and the roles they took during leisure reading. Both children interacted with print every day, but Briar appeared to self-select reading activities more often. Bomber also told me that he liked being read to, so it was likely that Briar was choosing a more active role when reading with her parents.

Issues for further consideration

Status of school reading

Formal reading instruction began when Bomber and Briar started school, but it was clear from the interview data that both children had been engaged in reading activities since infancy. While there had been little explicit instruction, there was a clear sense of familiarising the children with the sorts of experiences that would prepare them for school and for learning to read.

School reading appeared to be given a status above the informal everyday reading undertaken at home. It became the reading that was done before leisure reading. Consider the way in which Premack's principle is used in Bomber's house, for example, or Lucy's comment, "we mainly concentrate on the school books now".

The children also appeared to recognise that school reading was "real" reading. Both children had told me that they could read when they were preschoolers. Once they started school they told me that they "couldn't read", or "tried to read" more difficult texts. Before starting school the children got their parents to read more difficult books

and Briar talked of “telling stories”, so the children were aware of differences between their pseudo-reading and conventional reading as preschoolers. It seemed to become a more important distinction as they learned to read at school, and books became categorised as easy or hard.

Nicky and Lucy, while confident with everyday reading, became more cautious when working with the children on their homework reading. They often underrated the degree of support they were offering their children. Neither Nicky nor Lucy acknowledged the significant contribution they made to their children’s reading development. Both women seemed to be more aware of their lack of knowledge about teaching, than the effective strategies they were using as parents. The daily practice and frequent monitoring they were providing has been found to promote academic success (Finns, 1998), but they seemed unaware of the importance of their input. There was, of course, a valid reason for this. Teachers have status. They are viewed as experts. This is valid, to some extent. Miss B’s knowledge about reading was no doubt different to the parents’. Miss B’s teaching experience provided her with information and research findings that were outside the parents’ experience (Evans, Fox, Cremass, & McKinnon, 2004). Evans et al. found that adult education, rather than reading experiences as children, contributed to different understandings about reading and reading instruction. Miss B also self-selected literacy experiences, participating in ongoing professional development courses.

The children’s parents had some advantages over Miss B. Parents have access to children in smaller numbers for a much more extended period of time than teachers. The parents knew their children better than the teacher could hope to, and the children’s interactions around reading were much more visible at home than they were in the classroom. In addition, Nicky and Lucy had the opportunity to engage their children in reading activities for extended periods, beyond what Miss B could provide in the classroom. As Cowen (2003) has pointed out, classrooms provide inadequate reading practice, so home-based reading is essential for reading achievement. In this sense, Nicky and Lucy had as much to offer as Miss B.

Wylie (1994) investigated differences in perceptions of teacher roles and children's learning, seeking ways to promote more effective relationships. She found some contradictions around homework. While parents anticipated homework would be useful in providing information about their children's progress, teachers were concerned that young children not have too much work to do. Teachers also expressed concern that parents might be "undermining" their teaching with "old fashioned attitudes or discouraging teaching techniques" (p. 3).

Perry, Nordby and VandeKamp (2003) have responded to similar concerns from teachers. In earlier classroom studies they found that teachers were worried "that their efforts to promote metacognition, intrinsic motivation, and strategic action are not often reinforced at home" (p. 319), and that parents offered limited forms of support that may not have been developmentally appropriate. Perry et al.'s study was designed in response to these earlier anecdotal findings to investigate discrepancies between home and school contexts. While there was some discontinuity between home and school, the study revealed that parents' beliefs were more closely aligned with classroom instruction than teachers realised. The brief glimpses that teachers have of parents engaging with children in the classroom may not be representative of the more complex reading interactions at home.

In contrast to the teachers in Wylie's (1994) and Perry et al.'s (2003) recent studies, Miss B had faith in the children's parents to "do the right thing". She did express concerns that some families might not make reading homework and enjoyable experience, but she was confident that most families would provide the appropriate reading opportunities for children. However, it was not clear whether this had ever been articulated to the parents. Even if Miss B had told the parents that she trusted them to provide the right practice opportunities for their children, the parents did not necessarily trust themselves. For example, Nicky talked about sounding out as a strategy, and seemed to be a little concerned that she was doing the "right" thing. After telling me that she used sounding out as her primary prompting strategy, she asked if this was still what "they" were using at school. Lucy commented on her ability to teach as well, comparing herself to another parent:

- Lucy: (Oscar's) mum's a teacher.
- Briar: Is she?
- Lucy: Primary school teacher.
- Briar: Is she?
- Lucy: Mm. Like New Entrants.
- MC: Oh, okay. So children nearly as big as you?
- Lucy: At Rata school. Yes, so he must be learning a lot from his Mummy. (laughs) Lots and lots and lots.
- MC: What do you think it would be like to have a teacher as a Mum?
- Briar: I don't know.
- MC: You don't know? I think your quite happy with your Mum aren't you?
- Briar: (laughing) Yes.
- MC: I thought so.
- Lucy: (laughing) Mum tries to be like a teacher, but it doesn't always work, does it.
- Briar: You're not a teacher anyway.
- Lucy: I'm not a proper teacher. I teach you lots of things, don't I?
- Briar: You're a Mum.

Briar went on to say that her mother taught her to read and her father taught her how to draw. While they were a Mum and a Dad, and not teachers, Briar saw both parents as significant in the development of important skills for activities she enjoyed.

Nicky and Lucy respected Miss B's expertise as a teacher. Tweetie had been in Miss B's class as a New Entrant, so Nicky had prior knowledge of Miss B's skills. Lucy, in contrast, had no personal experience with the school before Briar's pre-entry visits. Miss B's professional status as a teacher led them to trust her as being the most knowledgeable about their children's reading development. This became evident in a number of ways. For example, Lucy commented in the first interview that Miss B would be able to "sort out" Briar's reversal of letters. Nicky was delighted when Miss B wrote (in the R.E.A.D. I.T. book) that Bomber could read 15 words, while Nicky was hesitant in making anything but general comments about Bomber's progress, even though she read with him every day.

The families also trusted Miss B's approach to reading. The homework activity was valued because it contributed to reading development. Nicky and Lucy had both

talked about the importance of repetition, so the practice opportunities associated with the task were recognised. They were also very aware of their children's progress, even if reluctant to comment on this. Throughout the study both mothers commented on consistent errors children made, or particular strategies they used when reading, that revealed that they closely monitored changes in behaviours. The feedback they provided in the R.E.A.D. I.T. book was further evidence of their role in assessing children's progress.

The status associated with reading homework was also evident in the way it was organised. Homework was a serious affair that was completed before or after play, rather than being part of the children's leisure time. It was a structured and supervised activity that was repeated if unsuccessful. It was also the only routine home activity to be documented and communicated to the school. Past research has found that interest in reading has been associated with fun activities rather than work (Perry, Nordby & VandeKamp, 2003), yet *homework* is presented as a dominant and more formal task than other home reading. Therefore, homework might potentially to be regarded in a less positive way than leisure reading. This did not appear to be true for the children in my study. Although the children commented on the lack of control they had over the homework task their parents reported that their children were happy to read to them each day and that they frequently displayed a sense of achievement when they were reading. Homework reading was a required task, but it was by no means an unpleasant experience for either the children or their parents at the time of the study.

Engagement with reading

Bus (2001) stated, "Children's interest is as much a prerequisite as a consequence of book reading" (p179). The focus children's ongoing reading experiences were, therefore, as important as their early experiences in terms of how they felt about reading. As noted above, both children enjoyed reading and looked forward to their homework at the time of the study. This was one of Miss B's two main objectives, to create an enjoyable family activity. Briar told me that reading at home (including homework) was "funner" than reading at school. By creating a positive reading experience it was more likely that the children would develop positive attitudes

towards reading. Positive attitudes would contribute to increased engagement with the reading task, thereby providing more practice (Miss B's second main objective).

To get a sense of how attitude and practice were both necessary for positive outcomes, it might be helpful to briefly examine Bomber and Briar's scores on letter identification and high frequency word recognition one month after school entry. These are presented on Table 14. Despite a lot of informal exposure to print as preschoolers neither Bomber nor Briar entered school with high achieving scores on letter identification or high frequency word recognition. Of a possible score of 54 for letter identification, Bomber scored 27 and Briar scored 17. Their word identification scores were 9 and 12 respectively, while other children in their class scored over 30. Miss B reported that they had both made good progress throughout the year, as formal instruction and homework became part of their daily routine.

Table 14

Bomber and Briar's Scores on Letter and Word Identification Tasks Approximately One Month After School Entry

	Bomber	Briar	Possible score
Letter identification	27	17	54
Word identification	9	12	30+

Although I did not ask the children directly about their attitudes to reading, their levels of engagement with reading activities, their talk of favourite types of books, and their talk about what was "funner" provided some indication that they both valued and enjoyed reading. A positive attitude was implied during interviews, and this is one of the factors, along with practice that was likely to have been a significant factor of the homework task that contributed to the children's reading progress. This can be discussed in terms of the Matthew effect, the term used to refer to the increasing gap between the performance of high achievers and low achievers as they progress through school (Stanovich, 1986). Had the homework activity been perceived as unpleasant it is likely that they would have resisted reading, and therefore had less practice and fallen behind. Stanovich argues that the number of reading experiences

children engage in is critical, and that differences emerge in the first year of schooling. The homework reading is likely to have contributed to the children's progress, as outlined in Figure 2, with enjoyment and practice forming part of a positive loop:

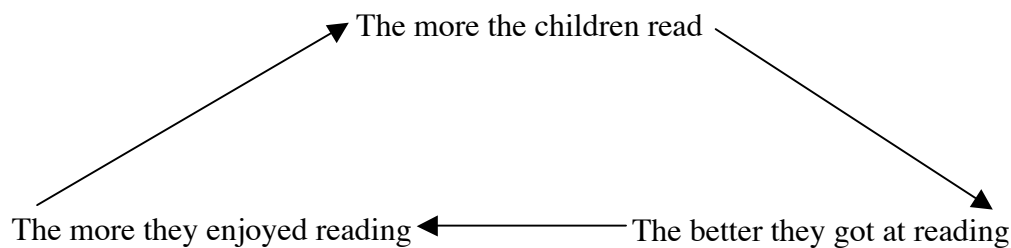


Figure 2. The way in which reading attitude and practice may contribute to reading progress.

The types of self-initiated practice children engaged in would also have impacted on how quickly the children progressed. Just as the children's motivation to read may be affected by their increasing competence, their early and ongoing interest will have contributed to the amount of reading they have engaged in (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997). Briar enjoyed reading more challenging books, and appeared to take a more active role when reading with her parents than Bomber did. This reading provided her with a greater number of reading experiences, at a more demanding level than her homework reading offered. Bomber, in contrast, appeared to spend more time listening and talking about stories. While this provided him with some of the important skills necessary for extracting meaning from text, he was less actively engaged than Briar was in decoding and processing text. Briar's leisure reading at five years old may have long-term implications for her school achievement too, as the amount of leisure time children spent reading has been found to have positive outcomes in terms of reading proficiency across primary grade levels (Anderson, Wilson & Fielding, 1988).

The self-initiated activities reflect the distinctions the children made between the homework task and their leisure reading. This continued separation of home and school reading had potential to affect the way that they engage with reading at a later

date. Bomber, for example, with his interest in using reading to find out things, associated this with non-school reading. The research skills associated with this type of reading are critical for future success at school, but unless his misconception about the role of school reading is challenged he may fail to make this connection. If school reading remains a skill building or learning to read exercise, and not the type of reading he is interested in, he may lose interest in school reading unless a direct connection is made to the research skills needed for other curriculum areas. The separation of curriculum areas or the separation of non-school reading and school reading has the potential to create two separate definitions of reading, rather than an integrated and complex notion of what counts as reading.

Hull and Schultz (2001) have argued that home literacy needs to be brought into the classroom. To some extent this seemed straightforward with the children in this study, as their home reading activities appeared to be a good fit with the classroom. Free choice reading, for example, was similar to the self-initiated reading Briar engaged in at home. There were a range of puzzles at the back of the classroom, so that Bomber had multiple opportunities to engage in one of his favourite indoor activities. There were plenty of animal books, which both children enjoyed, so their topics of interest were included. The relaxed nature of activities at the back of the classroom resembled the informal environment they experienced outside school hours. However, the children did not identify this as a reading activity. Somehow, this was not identified as learning to read. The value attached to an activity also impacted on how it was viewed in terms of what counted as reading. This was a fun activity, but once again, was not counted as school reading.

Having acknowledged the progress made during the study, it is important to stress that this study only focused on the beginning of the children's journeys to becoming skilled readers. Considerably more practice will be required as they move through school for them to develop additional skills typical of competent readers. Keeping children enthusiastic about school reading, and recognising and valuing the broad range of school and non-school activities that count as reading will be an ongoing issue for the children's parents and teachers.

Chapter Seven

WHAT COUNTS AS READING: THE VISIBLE VERSUS THE INVISIBLE

The final chapter is a discussion of the key findings of this study, and the implications for teachers working with young readers. The chapter is presented in three sections. I begin with a summary of the main findings from the three previous chapters, in which I draw back from the close scrutiny of specific classroom events to consider the broader issues for teachers working with young readers. The second section outlines the constraints of the study. The chapter closes with a brief exploration of possibilities for future research.

This study has revealed the realities of reading for two children as they describe them. The depth of information available because of the small number of participants has provided valuable insights into how children more generally may experience learning to read. These children participated in everyday activities that are typical of New Zealand classrooms. The ways in which they managed their interactions provides useful information for teachers working with other children, not only in relation to learning to read, but across the curriculum. For example, the children's reinterpretation of instructions and the management of tasks might be considered when working with New Entrants and considering how best to communicate teaching intentions and learning outcomes.

Making the invisible visible – key findings

The methodology used in my study has helped make the invisible events of the classroom visible. The continuous recordings of observation sessions have revealed many features of children's classroom experiences that generally go unnoticed but which have a significant impact on what children learn during reading instruction. The essence of this thesis has been the degree of repetition within each of the three

themes discussed in Chapters four, five and six. This repetition is directly related to what was hidden from the teacher (within and across tasks), and the numerous roles children played as they participated in reading activities inside, and outside, the classroom.

Learning to read does not occur in a vacuum and the three worlds of children have been the heart of this thesis. An awareness of the public, semi-private and private worlds has proved essential in accurately determining what the focus children learned about reading and how they learned to be readers. Very little of what was actually happening for them was evident in the public world of the classroom, yet this is typically all that is available to teachers. The public world is the world of methods and strategies (Nuthall, 2002), and is generally the level at which reading instruction, including the whole-language and phonics debate, is discussed. However, it provides no more than a glimpse of the children's reality. Most of the events that contributed to what the focus children in my study learned about what counted as reading occurred outside the teacher's awareness, even when she was working closely with individual children.

Classroom management is often discussed as an essential feature of effective teaching (Snowman & Biehler, 2006), with the implication being that teaching is directly connected to learning. My study challenges this notion, supporting Nuthall's (2005) claim that much of what occurs publicly in classrooms is about management, and that teaching is often only indirectly related to what children actually learn. My study supported Doyle's (1983) and Nuthall's (2005) claims that the children, as much as their teacher, contributed to this management focus. The children's perceptions of what was required to be good students, and the resulting management of their classroom experiences meant that Miss B rarely got a true picture of what children were actually learning. She also became complicit in their efforts to maintain the image of a good student.

The second key feature of my study was the interaction between, and integration of, children's roles in the classroom, within and across the three worlds. At school the children were learning to read at the same time as they were learning how to become

successful members of the classroom community. This study exposed the degree to which the dominant roles of reader and learner were interwoven. It became evident that the two roles shaped, and were shaped, by one another. It also became clear that these roles were taken up quickly and with relative ease, despite the children's age and their relative inexperience with the school environment. Much of what was being learned was not directly related to reading or to lesson content. Frequently tacit, rather than overt, messages defined the children's roles as readers and learners. The interplay between roles contributed to very complex patterns of interaction during reading instruction.

A third significant point that emerged during analysis of the data was the degree to which much of what was learned (or not learned) during reading instruction was beyond the teacher's control. Miss B could not anticipate all of the aspects of children's interactions with their peers, particularly when children were working at their desks or in the free choice area (which accounted for most of the available reading time). Nor could she determine how children worked on unsupervised reading activities in the classroom or at home. While Miss B provided a number of opportunities to engage in reading behaviours, the invisibility of the semi-private and private worlds meant that the ways that children engaged with tasks were frequently outside her awareness and control.

Finally, this study has revealed the importance of partnerships in teaching children to read. The demands of the broader classroom curriculum meant that the time available to focus specifically on reading was limited. In addition, the children's multiple agendas significantly reduced the time spent reading in class. Therefore, classroom *and* home experiences are crucial for the provision of adequate reading practice. It is essential that home and school share understandings of what counts as school reading and what is necessary to promote children's understanding and reading skills.

Each of these four features impacted on learning to read separately but they rarely, if ever, operated in isolation. Learning occurred at the intersection of these factors. Any attempt to separate out the key influences on children's experiences and understandings would oversimplify events, reducing the children's experiences to

incomplete and inaccurate snapshots. The repetition throughout the thesis is primarily related to the revelation that discrete factors do not act independently of others. The complexity of the findings of this study can be explored using two metaphors that combine the roles, events and perceptions of classroom participants. An iceberg represents classroom experiences, and children's roles may be discussed in terms of the skilful illusion. I have separated the two because the first is an inherent feature of the classroom environment that children must navigate their way around, while the second is a role (or roles) that the children manage in order to navigate their way through reading experiences.

The iceberg is an alternative way of describing the three worlds. The public world represents the tip of the iceberg, and all that is visible to the teacher. The bulk of the iceberg (the semi-private and private worlds) lies beneath the surface, and is generally beyond the teacher's awareness. Most of what occurs in a classroom sits below the "water level", yet it is this component that has the greatest impact – and can be the most destructive unless successfully managed.

The role of illusionist is necessary if children are to present themselves as good students in the public world. The illusion is created so that explicit (academic) agendas, generally determined by the teacher, can be met satisfactorily without compromising children's implicit (personal) agendas. The children's roles and their manipulation of the classroom environment in order to succeed meant that they became skilled illusionists very early in their school careers. They created a public image for the teacher that allowed her to see them in the most positive way. This image was rarely, if ever, completely accurate and required collusion with their peers and the unwitting assistance of their teachers and parents.

The public performance – merely the tip of the iceberg

Being seen to be good is very much a public issue, but it is only the tip of the iceberg. Yet this is generally the only information the teacher has available to indicate children's understanding of reading.

The focus children in this study recognised the significance of events in the public world of the classroom. The most visible act was that of reading one-to-one with the teacher during round robin reading, and this was the central feature of their descriptions of what counted as classroom reading. The round robin accounted for a very brief period of their reading instruction each day (an average of 24 seconds per child), but this was what the children saw as the most important element of the reading programme. Reading a book to the teacher was *real* reading. From the children's perspective, the reading they performed for the teacher counted more than anything they did independently. Unfortunately for the teacher, these brief periods represented very little of what was actually happening in the classroom and were highly managed public performances.

The children took great care to be seen as successful by the teacher during their daily public performances. Presenting a good image was evident in the nature of their reading responses, and what counted as correct when reading aloud. The focus on image has been a recurrent theme throughout this thesis. It was only through repeated linking of the children's experiences in different activities that patterns emerged and the priority given to impressing the teacher became evident. The insignificant frequently became significant during data analysis, and central to what the children learned during reading activities. For example,

- The brief glances at peers when completing worksheets ensured that a correct product was presented to the teacher
- Imitating responses appeared to be interpreted as correct responses during chorused reading
- Pauses in round robin reading meant that children avoided making overt error responses

The examples above illustrate the range of strategies used to ensure a teacher-pleasing and successful performance and reveal the value of sharing and documenting anecdotal information about children's classroom experiences. Single episodes became useful sources of information for teachers when considered in relation to other events. Brief comments each of the children made during interviews illustrate this point further. Briar, who enjoyed teasing her mother (and me) during interviews, commented that she would not trick teachers "because they're the teachers" during an interview. This comment was not repeated, so was purely anecdotal and of little significance, until viewed in relation to other classroom events, when it became part of a general pattern of pleasing the teacher. In a similar vein, Bomber's awareness of the importance of being good for the teacher was evident in his preschool games with his sister when he worked hard to avoid "being put on the bad list". What appeared to be isolated episodes frequently proved to have a significant influence on children's learning when a more detailed picture emerged and these events were viewed in relation to other apparently unconnected features of the classroom. Other incidents proved to be isolated events, and of little relevance. The importance of confirming anecdotal evidence before making assumptions about children's learning experiences was highlighted through an exploration of the three worlds.

The revelation of the three worlds of children, and particularly how little was seen by the teacher, has challenged me to reconsider the use of the term on-task. The children in the study were generally on-task and engaged in classroom activities throughout each observation session. Their satisfactory progress revealed that they were both learning how to read, as they worked through the activities set for them. However, their public performances failed to reveal the particular aspects the children were focusing on. Nor did the public classroom events reveal how they were managing to learn what mattered to the teacher or what would benefit them most in terms of becoming successful students. Becoming a successful student was about much more than learning academic content; being on-task was more often about learning how to look good than about learning how to get the most out of learning experiences.

The children in my study learned academic content during their first year at school, but their interactions during worksheet completion suggest that they learned much

more during the time spent on reading activities. Studies such as Clay's (1985) have recognised the importance of children participating in activities, or being on-task. However, these examinations of on-task behaviour have focussed on the tip of the iceberg, and the associated public displays of engagement. To get a more specific idea of what children are doing so that specific learning needs can be attended to, researchers and teachers must look beyond what is immediate and examine the "submerged" worlds. When the focus children worked to create successful products for the teacher they learned as much about how to be a successful student as they did about reading. They were learning how to manage the classroom environment to look good in the eyes of the teacher, they were learning what the teacher's expectations were and what counted as correct, and they were learning how to manage multiple agendas so that they maintained friendships with their peers while pleasing the teacher and learning to read.

This study supports the notion that the children's management of their environment contributed to what was seen in the public world, and that, to some degree, they controlled what was viewed as effective teaching. Listening to children's voices may reveal the implicit and unspoken understandings and theories that guide the way that adults, including teachers and researchers, approach tasks and their own understandings of what it is to be a reader. In doing so, unintentional or tacit messages that limit learning opportunities and contribute to misconceptions may be revealed.

Learning to read occurs as a social practice in the classroom (Nuthall & Alton-Lee, 1994). Although engaging in community activities, each participant brings individual understandings to shared situations. Until we acknowledge that reading instruction is as much about familiarising children with the everyday classroom routines as it is about the act of reading (Alexander, 2005-2006), children's interpretations of what reading is all about will remain largely invisible. Teachers and researchers have to find out what children think is important as they engage in reading tasks in order to have a clear understanding of what matters as they learn to become readers and students.

The importance of managing the classroom so that public events run smoothly has several implications for teachers. Public performance and associated expectations make a positive contribution to learning situations. Without a clear structure, children may have to work harder at determining how to be good students, which would make them less able to work with lesson content. In addition, public performance provides teachers with some indication (although not complete) of how children are progressing and of their individual understandings, and provides models of correct or desired responses for classmates. The challenge for teachers is to balance management with a focus on learning, so that learning becomes the more important.

Redefining what counts as on-task and recognising what task engagement involves beyond surface features, acknowledges that there is more to consider than children learning lesson content. Awareness of the multiple layers of participation in activities provides teachers with the opportunity to develop strategies to work with social and non-content agendas to promote more effective learning outcomes.

Illusions in the public world – hidden depths or sleight of hand?

There seemed to be two main types of illusion operating in the classroom that allowed children to be seen as good students. There were deliberate attempts to mask rule breaking and there were subtle and possibly unintentional acts of self-initiated scaffolding and “cheating” that contributed to correct public performances. The former relate to the children’s role as illusionists, while the latter appear to be incidental or non-strategic in nature. Deliberate acts are discussed first.

Children managed three acts simultaneously when breaking rules while presenting themselves as good students. Not only did they maintain the illusion of on-task behaviour whilst meeting their implicit agendas, but they had to simultaneously monitor the teacher’s behaviour to ensure that any inappropriate behaviour remained unnoticed. Bomber and Freddie’s whispering during mat time illustrated this type of illusion on a number of occasions. They played together throughout activities whilst responding to teacher questions at appropriate moments by raising their hands or repeating peer responses. While the semi-private world had the greatest impact on

what was learned during activities, public responses did not reflect this. The children became very skilled at managing their explicit (academic) and implicit (personal) agendas so that, even when their implicit agendas dominated this was not obvious to the teacher.

Monitoring was central to task completion when children worked individually, so that the illusion of being correct was often the result of effective management rather than direct knowledge of academic content. The children became skilled managers of their environment in ways that reduced the risk of public error without exposing their shortcomings or overtly seeking help. For example, frequent glances at peers' work during worksheet completion meant that children increased their chances of presenting a correct worksheet to Miss B, without exposing gaps in their knowledge.

Tensions existed between the implicit and explicit curricula of the classroom (McCarthy, 2001; Nuthall, 2000f) that sometimes led to time and energy being dedicated to agendas that had little to do with learning to read. Friendships were one of the most valued aspects of classroom life, with a great deal of time being spent in maintaining and renegotiating these with peers. A considerable period of time and much of the children's effort was focused on illusions designed to support social agendas. Children supported one another in hiding events from the teacher, even when they were the victims of teasing or exclusion. For example, Bomber did not react to being jostled in his seat when it threatened to interfere with his worksheet completion at a public level. He responded at the semi-private level, but did not approach the teacher or draw her attention to his situation, thereby ensuring that the event remained hidden.

Even when friendships were strained, children worked to resolve conflict without the teacher's knowledge. The incident when Bomber ruined Freddie's drink bottle (pp. 106-107) illustrated this clearly. Even though the boys' distress became evident in the public world and the two boys were not friendly at the time, they worked together to limit public exposure, using their peer network to settle their problems once the teacher left. When Miss B sensed that things occurred beyond the visible world and approached the children, they deliberately excluded her as she tried to resolve

stressful situations (e.g., Bomber's straw-cutting incident.) This sort of underground network makes it difficult for teachers to resolve tensions in the classroom, and challenges them to consider how situations might be settled quickly and appropriately so that time on learning activities is increased and implicit agendas become less significant than explicit agendas.

The children's responses indicated that not all of their illusions were deliberate, and that they may not have been aware of some the illusions they created. For example, Bomber and Briar reported that they did not talk while completing worksheets. It never became clear whether this was because good students did not talk, or because their talk simply was not relevant to the task and therefore not seen as part of the activity at all. The challenge for teachers is to make the distinction between deliberate false reporting, and genuine (mis)perceptions of events.

The children's illusions of correct responding were frequently effective in the public world of the classroom, and it was only through the microanalysis of recorded data that these were revealed for what they were – mere illusions. Nuthall has described examples of “bluff” in older children (2004b), but New Entrants are often described in terms of inexperience and deficits, so it was surprising how early in their school careers the children became proficient illusionists. This suggests that teachers and researchers need to reconsider the assumptions that young children are not skilled or knowledgeable about classroom dynamics.

The illusion of being correct also challenges us to reconsider studies that provide benchmark figures for optimal learning outcomes. Both children responded correctly less than 50% of the time during chorused reading, but appeared to reach the suggested benchmark of 80% (Rosenshine, 1983) because of their repeated use of imitating and skipped responses. Without close monitoring of responses, and a detailed examination of how benchmark figures are established, the impact of illusions may not be limited to individuals but become part of accepted practice. Furthermore, studies such as that undertaken by Anderson, Wilkinson et al. (1988) may reveal the impact of children's attempts to maintain the illusion of success. Anderson, Wilkinson et al.'s study revealed that children waiting to read during round

robins benefited from peer errors. While they suggested that errors followed by feedback contributed to increasing reading skills, they may actually have been identifying one of the ways in which children manipulated events to present themselves as good students as well.

Management of the semi-private world that contributes to illusions in the public world has often been the focus of research on co-operative groups (e.g., Kollar et al., 1994). This study has revealed that issues within groups are also central features of individual activities. Even when working individually the children were simultaneously engaged in multiple agendas, maintaining their status and friendships as well as completing the academic task. Agendas were often met, not through a reliance on metacognitive strategies, but through manipulation of the environment and the teacher's behaviour. What was apparent in the public world was often largely the result of these interactions at the semi-private level, but not the processes involved.

Learning to be a student was as important as learning to read for these children, and the constant negotiation of tasks and roles contributed to their understandings of reading. The children's progress has reflected their developing understanding of how to succeed at school as much as their reading skills and knowledge – sometimes more so. Their responses in class activities have sometimes reflected their ability to “play the game” (Collins, 2005, p. 386), presenting a successful image while not necessarily being able to respond independently. Piloting and semi-private interactions, rather than academic problem solving has frequently resulted in correct responses. In many ways this means that the children's real reading voice may become lost within their nested classroom roles and agendas. The challenge for teachers and researchers is to make the distinction between what counts publicly and what actually matters in terms of children's learning.

My concern is not so much that these children, at five years of age, focused on being successful students and readers, and on what they thought the teacher wanted to see. My concern is related to the long-term implications for learning if these continue to be the defining features of success at school. Metacognitive skills are critical for later school success and understanding, but Doyle's (1983) research revealed that children

become increasingly skilled at reducing the ambiguity and risk associated with academic tasks over time. The danger is that children become increasingly focused on getting teachers to provide answers rather than developing metacognitive strategies to monitor their own problem solving. The children's primitive form of piloting in my study provides further evidence of this occurring early in children's school lives. Rather than being scaffolded and supported in coming to correct conclusions themselves, children work at being given the answer by others instead. One of the pitfalls associated with piloting, from a teacher's perspective, is that the teacher becomes caught up in this cycle too. Piloting keeps classroom activities moving along and reduces the number of time-consuming interruptions (Doyle, 2006). While task engagement remains high, learning opportunities are limited by the nature of the interaction. If the long term goal of teaching reading includes children using text effectively for later learning, then the effect of a reliance on piloting rather than metacognitive skills must be considered as the children move through school.

Learning processes are socially constructed (Nuthall & Alton-Lee, 1994), so the ways in which teachers communicate their instructions and intended learning outcomes to children will influence which learning strategies and processes children use throughout their school life (Winne & Marx, 1982). If teachers wish to encourage strategic readers who use metacognitive skills effectively then this needs to be not only communicated clearly, but also assessed regularly, so that children's management of the environment and their semi-private responses are conducive to learning, and personal agendas do not dominate in learning situations.

Michel (1994) argued that by finding out about children's understandings of what counts as reading in the classroom teachers would be able to teach more effectively. My study has revealed that getting at the "truth" of individual's understandings may be difficult, and that what children tell teachers about reading may only partially reflect their underlying beliefs. Children may be anxious to reassure teachers that they know what is important in the classroom, rather than being open about how they actually go about tasks. Their illusions may be about trying to please adults in the classroom rather than deliberate attempts to mislead teachers. This was equally true of children's interview responses. Miss B certainly used a range of strategies, but the

children valued some more than others, and did not acknowledge their use of some tactics at all. To use less explicit strategies, or those that were less valued may have been perceived as less likely to please teachers and therefore regarded as cheating, as some of the responses in Michel's study implied.

Classroom history has an impact on what is communicated explicitly and what remains implicit. By the end of this study, the focus children had known each other for over a year. They had taken on roles within the group, within the class and within the school. The children were familiar with many ways of being successful, and also recognised what teachers were looking for during classroom interactions, and their expectations of the class as individuals and as a whole. These understandings of what was important at school influenced the ways in which the focus children approached their reading activities at school and at home.

The exposure of illusions in the classroom supports Duffy and Hoffman's (1999) argument that teachers and researchers must look beyond a "perfect method" of reading instruction (p. 10). This study has revealed that the public world, the world of methods and strategies, is more often a world of illusion than a world of reality. Therefore, children and teachers will have manipulated any method of instruction, regardless of where this lies on the whole language – phonics continuum, to meet their own needs. The complex interactions evident in Room 1 also challenge the notion that a single method could meet the needs of all children at any given time. Duffy and Hoffman have argued that policy often emphasises the importance of "minimum competency", and this may be reflected in children's attempts to look good for the teacher in the public world, often at the cost of "maximising learning" (p. 13). Methods and strategies, like broader classroom experiences are complex, and are open to individual interpretation and management by individual children and teachers. The manipulation of the classroom environment may mean that the greatest impact of particular approaches to reading is not evident in the public world at all. The true impact of methods and strategies on learning may lie beneath the tip of the iceberg, hidden from view.

In summary, it is difficult to respond to children's individual learning needs unless teachers are aware of what children view as most important about school, or which features of activities they attend to. An awareness of the role of illusion and children's multiple agendas is necessary if teachers are to promote positive learning experiences as children make the transition to school (Dockett & Perry, 2003) and later in their school lives (Nuthall, 1999). Communication of the purposes of tasks and explicit modelling of metacognitive strategies are important features in establishing what really counts, rather than the surface features and "doing" focus of activities that are more often made explicit (Nuthall, 1999). A more open acknowledgement of the pressure to look good might be a helpful starting point in separating management and learning that could be useful for both teachers and children in promoting more active learning in classrooms.

Task engagement – navigating around the iceberg

I have emphasised that the focus children were generally engaged with the activities Miss B set for them during my time in Room 1. The connections between the three worlds and the children's roles have meant that the children learned much more than the lesson content the teacher presented. Children rarely, if ever, learned reading skills in isolation. They were also learning in ways different from what Miss B intended.

Discussion of task engagement extends beyond the on-task level discussed earlier in this chapter. Task engagement is a multidimensional event. Learning to read has been revealed as a social activity involving a complex interaction between cognitive, affective and environmental factors (McKenna, 1994). Just as children's attitudes to reading develop over time, the ways that the focus children engaged with reading material and talked about reading evolved in relation to these factors. One of the consistent patterns throughout this study was the children's willing participation in reading tasks. Although they both tested boundaries with respect to classroom rules, chipping away at the fringes of the iceberg, Bomber and Briar did not appear to question the need to complete classroom activities.

The focus children prioritised school reading tasks, and spent time ensuring that activities that would be viewed in the public world were completed to an appropriate standard. Although I have commented on the product, rather than the process of activities, often being the focus of children's attention, the children were still enthusiastic participants in unsupervised tasks. Bomber and Briar spent considerable amounts of time on individual worksheet tasks even though they were free to complete them quickly and move on to other, less public, activities. Although they learned to use different strategies than those modelled by Miss B (e.g., worksheet – phonological awareness was replaced with copying), they actively contributed to all the reading events I observed.

Repeated engagement with tasks ensured that the children got regular spaced practice with a range of essential reading skills. They talked about meaning, they identified letters and sounds, and they learned word attack skills and became increasingly familiar with punctuation and prosodic knowledge. However, the dimensions of the task that the children spent much of their time on were not those most important for developing reading skills. For example, time spent on colouring in may have led to an improvement in fine motor coordination that might make story writing easier, but children may have benefited more from spending additional time working on free choice puzzles or games that promoted phonemic awareness instead.

It became evident that the number of reading opportunities that were used in the way the teacher intended them to be was much smaller than the number provided. A number of reading opportunities were provided in unsupervised tasks, and the ways in which these were used were often beyond Miss B's control. Her attempts to provide spaced practice were likely to lead to positive outcomes (Church, 1999; Slavin, 2003), but only if the children actually used them consistently. As the period between exposures to material is significant in terms of what is learned and what is forgotten (Nuthall & Alton-Lee, 1994), this was a critical consideration in patterns of practice.

The children in this study did not use all the learning opportunities Miss B offered effectively, despite their active involvement in classroom reading activities. This evidence is consistent with earlier research (Doyle, 1983; Nuthall & Alton-Lee,

1994). Teachers must think about how they might provide enough learning opportunities so that even the least attentive or enthusiastic child in a class is likely to engage with the content or skill on a sufficient number of occasions so that it is processed and remembered. The complexity of the classroom makes provision of adequate practice a difficult task for teachers. Not only is the teacher required to have a sense of which children are actively engaged with the academic content (determining what is illusion and what is reality), but she must be aware of which features of the task are being attended to and the strategies children are using to problem solve (something generally out of her control, and submerged below the tip of the iceberg).

This point highlights, once again, the importance of accurately responding to children's voices. Shuell (1996) acknowledged that "the manner in which the student perceives, interprets, and processes information from the various things that happen during a lesson (and at other times) is the primary determiner of the educational outcomes acquired by students" (p. 727). A "responsive relationship" (Hinchman & Michel, 1999, p. 585) becomes possible through kid watching or listening to children. Making children's voices prominent increases teachers' awareness of the children's active role in their own learning without placing undue responsibility for learning on children's shoulders inappropriately. An awareness of individual voices is not possible for a teacher working with 20 to 30 children at any given time. The key may be to develop strategies in response to an awareness of the three worlds and associated agendas that can be applied in a general sense to provide additional learning opportunities.

Research on teaching commonly focuses on what teachers do and how the strategies and features of classroom life contribute to positive achievement in beginning readers (Winne & Marx, 1982), but the invisible worlds of children and children's voices appear to be largely absent. Although much of what occurs in classrooms is beyond the teacher's control, it is important to observe and talk with children. Without listening to children's voices teachers cannot determine exactly what they are learning during activities beyond measures of achievement and levels of performance. Secondary indicators of learning, such as busy-ness and enthusiasm that are often

relied on may mean that success is regarded in terms of effective routine skills, and the ability to go through the motions of activities, rather than actually having anything to do with the intended learning outcomes (Alton-Lee & Nuthall, 1998; Nuthall, 2005).

The microanalysis of the data in my study supports the notion that secondary indicators do not provide an accurate picture of what is being learned, and more often than not are as much about management of the environment and maintaining an acceptable image as they are about learning and engaging with content. Closer attention to the ways in which children engage in activities will provide teachers with information about ways in which they might have more positive effects on children's learning, while acknowledging that children are as active as teachers in determining how learning opportunities are used.

The nature of the types of engagement will determine the amount of reading children actually do, and the skills they practice, which will contribute to how they perceive specific reading tasks and reading in general. Many of the features of classroom activities were designed to address cognitive factors, promoting the development of skills and knowledge. However, my study has revealed some of the ways in which non-cognitive factors were central to reading at school and contributed to children engaging with essential reading content far less often than the teacher suspected. Learning to be a student has the potential to compromise learning to become a learner.

Partnerships – a rescue mission or teamwork?

Reading is a social act, and learning to read is a social activity. At school, reading was also usually a public activity. The focus children in this study interacted with the teacher, their fellow elephants and their peers as they used the books and resources available in the classroom. At home, the children completed their homework with their parents. Reading was rarely a private activity for Bomber or Briar. The children, their parents and their teachers were all central characters in the children's reading experiences, so partnerships existed throughout the study. The important point about

these partnerships is what they offered Bomber and Briar, and the ways in which they contributed to what the children learned about reading.

Children need to learn to read fluently in order to do well in school. A great deal of practice is required for children to learn to read fluently. Miss B acknowledged that the children needed more reading opportunities than she could offer in class.

Additional practice was even more essential because this study has indicated that the children were getting less practice than the teacher realised. Martin's research (cited in Church, 1999) compounds this lack of practice, revealing that the books used for early reading instruction do not provide sufficient practice opportunities to build fluency. The combination of these factors means that the homework task and leisure reading cannot be regarded as add-ons to classroom reading, or strategies for reinforcing or consolidating what has been taught at school. Homework reading is an integral part of the children's reading programme; it is not merely desirable, it is essential. This activity is not designed to simply provide support, or to rescue children who fall behind their peers. Home-school partnerships, or teamwork, must be a feature of effective reading programmes.

The focus children's parents had created a greater number of learning opportunities with school books than a single homework reading would provide, particularly when the text was difficult. They had encouraged the children to play with their word cards, and showed a genuine interest in what the children were doing at school. They took the responsibility of homework reading very seriously; it took priority over other family reading events. In addition to the homework task, the parents interacted with a range of print-based materials so that children were deliberately and incidentally involved in other reading activities each day.

Miss B's aims for the homework task, and the role she saw parents playing had not been made explicit. Shared understandings of *why* the homework reading was essential as well as *what* was required would promote a greater degree of reciprocity. While Miss B could control events in the classroom to some extent, she had little control over what happened during reading time at home. Explicit discussion of the role of parents in the reading development of their children would be valuable in

terms of communicating Miss B's aims and expectations, and also her confidence in parents' ability to meet these.

Clear articulation of the number of practice opportunities and the types of opportunities necessary for children to benefit from the school reading programme would provide parents with non-emotive, research-based information. Explicit discussion would provide a clear message that parents are seen as equal partners, rather than giving them the support role that Nicky and Lucy currently seem to feel is theirs. For the development of genuine partnerships between teachers and families the issues of role and status would have to be directly addressed.

Feedback is another aspect of homework reading that must be regarded as essential for developing reading skills. This was important for both the children and the teacher. First, the children required adequate feedback on their reading performance. Miss B could only provide individual children with a small amount of individual feedback during class time, as there were few occasions when they responded individually. The classroom behaviours that children had learned (e.g., imitating responses, skipped responses) further compromised the provision of accurate feedback. Immediate and specific feedback would be far more effective in reducing errors and increasing correct responses, and could be provided more effectively during the more extended periods of one-to-one reading typical of homework reading.

Second, Miss B recognised that she had little information, or feedback, about children's reading beyond the classroom. Finding out more about children's home reading experiences would not only provide her with a more complete understanding of the quality and tone of reading interactions at home, but also provide additional perspectives of children's interpretation of reading events. Multiple perspectives, as this research has shown, provide a more accurate description of children's understandings of reading. They would also provide her with detailed information about how best to proceed with individual reading instruction.

The importance of feedback, or communication between home and school can also be considered in terms of provision of appropriate opportunities for diverse learners.

Effective communication extends to the complex nature of children's reading experiences too. Children's non-school identities and experiences contributed to the ways they engaged in reading activities (Hull & Schultz, 2001), and how they perceived and defined reading experiences. Teachers have even less access to information about family literacy practices than they do to classroom reading events. At the very least, knowledge of non-school identities recognises diversity and reveals what counts as reading for individual families. An awareness of the diversity of family literacy practices provides teachers with information that can be used to better meet the needs of individual children. In addition it might promote shared understandings of what matters when children are learning to read. There were distinct differences in the way the focus children in my study viewed reading at home and at school. It would be beneficial if the positive attributes of either setting could be replicated in the other setting. This challenges teachers, parents and researchers to reassess the nature of home – school partnerships. Parents should not be seen as simply supporting teachers with reading instruction; they need to be regarded as essential equal partners. This partnership is important if children are to get sufficient practice to become competent readers in both school ways and non-school ways.

Constraints

Renegotiation of the timeline of classroom observations resulted in less intensive data collection over a shorter period of time than I had originally planned. This meant that fewer specific events were observed and recorded, which in turn limited opportunities for analysis of particular types of incidents because it was not clear whether they were anomalies or repeated events. Additional observations would have been valuable in determining whether single events related to the broader patterns that emerged in relation to the children's understanding of reading and their negotiation of the classroom environment. Given the revelation of the number of insignificant events that became significant influences on children's reading experiences when interwoven with similar events, this was somewhat frustrating.

An inherent challenge associated with this type of study, and acknowledged by Collins (2005) and O'Toole (2005), is the cost of this type of research in terms of both

time and financial commitment. This has implications in terms of replication of the study. Data collection alone took more than a year and analysis and writing took an additional two years. Such research not only requires a high level of commitment from researchers, but also from participants. While mine was only a small study, the classroom observations made ongoing demands on a teacher in a busy and constantly changing environment for a five-month period. The commitment required of the focus families was even greater in terms of time – follow up interviews extended over a period of approximately eight months after classroom observations finished.

Further research

The family literacy literature that was briefly introduced in Chapter Six has revealed how significant the impact of the home environment is on children's developing skills and knowledge of reading. In this study, the children and their mothers have provided me with some insights into their understandings of key features of non-school reading. Homework and bedtime reading, as daily activities, appear to be significant events in the children's lives. The interview responses from this study provide a starting point for further investigation of the impact of home reading, on reading achievement and on children's understandings of reading. The nature of interactions at home would provide an additional and equally important window into children's experiences during their first year at school. An observational study, using a similar method of data collection to that used in the classroom for this study, would extend the knowledge in the area of the impact of home reading on children's knowledge.

There is a wealth of data collected for this study that has not been analysed in detail. I have only discussed two regular reading activities of all the regular events in Room 1 in this thesis. This provides a partial picture of the children's reading experiences in Room 1. A closer examination of additional activities in Room 1 could be used to expand the information presented in this thesis about the content of lessons, instructional strategies, and what was learned about reading.

Although this study was designed to follow children through their first year at school, it has become evident what a brief period this is when following a child's experience

of learning to read. A longitudinal study would provide a more complete sense of the children's voices. It would also permit a more in-depth look at reading as children are exposed to different types of instruction within what is now a familiar school environment and become increasingly articulate and more practised at managing their home and school tasks. In addition, children are assessed more formally as they progress through school, providing an additional dimension for further study. Additional observations as children progress through school, into Room 2 and beyond, would be valuable in determining whether the patterns of behaviour and the management of the three worlds continue to have a significant impact on learning to read.

One of the themes that the children hinted at, and described anecdotally throughout the study, related to gender. While beyond the scope of the current study, and too incomplete to explore thoroughly from the data collected, this came through as important for each of the children in several ways. Bomber talked about reading different types of books than the girls, the children talked of gender-based friendships, and they made generalised boy-girl statements. Although I did not look in depth at the ways in which children interacted during group activities, there did appear to be some differences in the way particular members of the class maintained status that may have been related to implicit notions of gender.

Briar has the final word

This section ends the thesis and brings this chapter of the children's stories to a close. However, it is important to remember that their first year at school represents only a brief part of their stories as young readers. Bomber and Briar are still learning more about reading every day, and they continue to talk about reading with their parents, teachers, siblings and friends. These two children have articulated clear understandings of reading and what it is to be a reader. The challenge has been to *hear* what they really had to say, and to *see* how their understandings of reading were expressed, beyond their public performances.

Giving children a voice means acknowledging when children feel they have told you enough, and respecting their wish to draw things to a close. During the final interviews, both children indicated that they had finished talking for the time being. Bomber told me that he had had “enough telling [me] stuff” and began flicking through *Dragon In a Wagon* (Dodd, 1990), showing me all the pictures. Briar got out one of her new books, a collection of short stories, and began to read to me. Their message was clear – they wanted me to stop talking about reading and let them get on with it. This remains the challenge for teachers - to provide the best possible situations in which children can actually get on with the task, and the pleasure, of learning to read.

In fact, in letting the children have the final word, I have come full circle. This thesis finishes where it started. Briar’s final interview question was, “Um, can I read you this?” She could and she did. It was an impressive performance and one that unfortunately, like so many others, her teacher did not have the opportunity to witness.

REFERENCES

- Adams, M. J. (1990). *Beginning to read*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Adams, M. J., Foorman, B. R., Lundberg, I., & Beeler, T. (1998). *Phonemic awareness in young children: A classroom curriculum*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.
- Alexander, P. A. (2005-2006). The path to competence: A lifespan developmental perspective on reading. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 37, 413-436.
- Alton-Lee, A. G. (2001). Research ethics, classroom research and educational practice. In M. Tolich (Ed.), *Research ethics in Aotearoa New Zealand* (pp. 87-98). Auckland: Longman.
- Alton-Lee, A. G. (2003). *Quality teaching for diverse students in schooling: Best evidence synthesis*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.
- Alton-Lee, A. G. (2006). How teaching influences learning: Implications for educational researchers, teachers, teacher educators and policy makers. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 22, 612-626.
- Alton-Lee, A. G., & Nuthall, G. A. (1992). Children's learning in classrooms: Challenges in developing a methodology to explain "opportunity to learn". *Journal of Classroom Interaction*, 27(2), 1-7.
- Alton-Lee, A. G., & Nuthall, G. A. (1998). *Inclusive instructional design: Theoretical principles emerging from the Understanding Learning and Teaching Project*. Report to the Ministry of Education, Wellington: Ministry of Education.
- Alton-Lee, A. G., Nuthall, G. A., & Patrick, J. (1999). Reframing classroom research: A lesson from the private world of children. In E. Mintz & J. T. Yun (Eds.), *The complex world of teaching: Perspectives from theory and practice* (pp. 43-75). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Educational Review.
- Anderson, L. M., Stevens, D. D., Prawat, R. S., & Nickerson, J. (1988). Classroom task environments and students' task-related beliefs. *The Elementary School Journal*, 88, 281-295.
- Anderson, R. C., Wilkinson, I., Mason, J. M., Shirey, L., & Wilson, P. T. (1988). Do errors on classroom reading tasks slow growth in reading? *The Elementary School Journal*, 88, 267-280.
- Anderson, R. C., Wilson, P. T., & Fielding, L. G. (1988). Growth in reading and how children spend their time outside school. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 23, 285-303.
- Appleton, K. (1995). Routines and the first few weeks of class. *The Clearing House*, 68, 293-296.

- Auerbach, E. R. (1989). Toward a social-contextual approach to family literacy. *Harvard Educational Review*, 59, 165-181.
- Biddulph, F., Biddulph, J., & Biddulph, C. (2003). *The complexity of community and family influences on children's achievement in New Zealand: Best evidence synthesis*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.
- Bogdan, R. (1982). *Illiterate or learning disabled?: A symbolic interactionist approach to the social dimensions of reading and writing*. Paper presented at the International Reading Association, Syracuse, New York.
- Bohn, C. M., Roehrig, A. D., & Pressley, M. (2004). The first days of school in the classrooms of two more effective and four less effective primary-grades teachers. *The Elementary School Journal*, 104, 269-287.
- Bondy, E. (1990). Seeing it their way: What children's definitions of reading tell us about improving teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 41(4), 33-45.
- Briggs, F., & Nichols, S. (2001). Pleasing yourself and working for the teacher: Children's perceptions of school. *Early Childhood Development and Care*, 170, 13-30.
- Brooker, L. (2002). *Starting school – Young children learning cultures*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Bus, A. G. (2001). Joint caregiver-child storybook reading: A route to literacy development. In S. B. Neuman & D. K. Dickinson (Eds.), *Handbook of early literacy research, volume 1* (pp. 179-191). New York: The Guildford Press.
- Carr, M. (2000). Seeking children's perspectives about their learning. In A. B. Smith, N. J. Taylor, & M. M. Gollop (Eds.) *Children's voices: Research, policy and practice* (pp. 37-55). Auckland: Pearson Education New Zealand Limited.
- Carter, K., & Doyle, W. (2006). Classroom management in early childhood and elementary classrooms. In C. M. Evertson & C. S. Weinstein (Eds.), *Handbook of classroom management: Research, practice and contemporary issues* (pp. 373-406). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.
- Cazden, C. B. (1986). Classroom discourse. In M. Wittrock (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teaching* (3rd ed.) (pp. 432-463). New York: McMillan.
- Church, R. J. (1999). *Basic learning processes*. Christchurch, New Zealand: University of Canterbury.
- Clay, M. M. (1985). Engaging with the school system: A study of interactions in new entrant classrooms. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, 20(1), 20-38.
- Clay, M. M. (1998). *By different paths to common outcomes*. York, ME: Stenhouse Publishers.

- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2000). *Research methods in education*. (5th ed.). London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Collins, S. E. (2005). "Excuse me, do we put a border around it?" *The culture of learning that provides opportunities for students to learn or not learn in middle school classroom*. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Canterbury.
- Coxon, M. (2002). *Kitten's adventure*. Mascot, NSW: Koala Books.
- Cowen, J. E. (2003). *A balanced approach to beginning reading instruction*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Dahl, K. L. (1995). Challenges in understanding the learner's perspective. *Theory in to Practice*, 34, 124–130.
- Davis, A. (2006). Crossing divides: The legacy of Graham Nuthall. *Teaching and Teacher Education* 22, 547-554.
- Dockett, S., & Perry, R. (2003). "Don't eat other people's lunch" – Children's views of starting school. *Set: research information for teachers, No. 1*, 15-17.
- Dodd, L. (1990). *Dragon in a wagon*. Auckland: Penguin Books Ltd.
- Dodd, L. (1997). *Sniff-snuff-snap!* Auckland: Penguin Books Ltd.
- Doyle, W. (1983). Academic work. *Review of Educational Research*, 53, pp.159-199.
- Doyle, W. (2006). Ecological approaches to classroom management. In C. M. Evertson & C. S. Weinstein (Eds.), *Handbook of classroom management: Research, practice and contemporary issues* (pp. 97-125). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.
- Duffy, G. G., & Hoffman, J. V. (1999). In pursuit of an illusion: The flawed search for a perfect method. *The Reading Teacher*, 53, 10-16.
- Evans, M. A., Fox, M., Cremaso, L., & McKinnon, L. (2004). Beginning reading: The views of parents and teachers of young children. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 96, 130-141.
- Farquhar, S. (2003). *Quality teaching early foundations - Best evidence synthesis*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.
- Finns, J. (1998). Parental engagement that makes a difference. *Educational Leadership*, 55(8), 20-24.
- Fisher, H. (1999). Family literacy: The hidden need. *Australasian Public Libraries and Information Services*, 12, 72-82.
- Fivush, R. (1984). Learning about school: The development of kindergarteners' school scripts. *Child Development*, 55, 1697-1709.

- Gallimore, R., & Goldenberg, C. (1993). Activity settings of early literacy: Home and school factors in children's emergent literacy. In E. A. Forman, N. Minick, & C. A. Stone (Eds.), *Contexts for learning: Sociocultural dynamics in children's development* (pp. 315-335). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Gollop, M. M. (2000). Interviewing children: a research perspective. In A. B. Smith, N. J. Taylor, & M. M. Gollop (Eds.) *Children's voices: Research, policy and practice* (pp. 18-36). Auckland: Pearson Education New Zealand Limited.
- Goodman, K. (2005). Making sense of written language: A lifelong journey. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 37(1), 1-24.
- Green, C., Lilly, E., & Barrett, T. M. (2002). Families reading together: Connecting literature and life. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 16, 248-262.
- Guthrie, J. T., & Greaney, V. (1996). Literacy acts. In R. Barr, M. L. Kamil, P. B. Mosenthal, & D. Pearson (Eds.), *Handbook of reading research, volume II* (pp. 68-96). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Inc.
- Heath, S. B. (2000). What no bedtime story means: Narrative skills at home and school. In P. K. Smith & A. D. Pellegrini (Eds.) *Psychology of education: Major themes* (pp. 32-60). London, New York: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Herrenkohl, L. P., Palincsar, A. S., DeWater, L. S., & Kawasaki, K. (1999). Developing scientific communities in classrooms: A sociocognitive approach. *The Journal of the Learning Sciences*, 8, 451-494.
- Hill, S., Comber, B., Loudon, W., Rivalland, J., & Reid, J. (2002). *100 children turn 10: A longitudinal study of literacy development from the year prior to school to the first four years of school*. Project Report, Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training, South Australia.
- Hinchman, K. A., & Michel, P. A. (1999). Reconciling polarity: Toward a responsive model of evaluating literacy performance. *The Reading Teacher*, 52, 578-587.
- Hoffman, J. V. , & Duffy, G. G. (2001). Beginning reading instruction: Moving beyond the debate over methods into the study of principled teaching practices. In J. Brophy (Ed.) *Advances in research on teaching: Vol. 8. Subject-specific instructional methods and activities* (pp. 25-49). New York: Elsevier Science Ltd.
- Hull, G., & Schultz, K. (2001). Literacy and learning out of school: A review of theory and research. *Review of Educational Research*, 71, 575-611.
- Jeynes, W. H., & Littell, S. W. (2000). A meta-analysis of studies examining the effect of whole language instruction on the literacy of low-SES students. *The Elementary School Journal*, 101, 21-33.
- Juel, C. (1994). *Learning to read and write in one elementary school*. New York: Springer-Verlag.

- Kluzek, S., & Coldwell, A. (2001). *R.E.A.D. I.T. home reading junior level. (Rev. ed.)* Victoria, Australia: Kluwell Publications.
- Kollar, G., Anderson, C., & Palincsar, A. S. (1994, March). *Power, status and personal identity in small group problem solving: the effects of social power and task specific agendas*. Paper presented at the National Association for Research in Science Teaching, Anaheim.
- Kuhn, M. R. (2003). Fluency in the classroom: Strategies for whole-class and group work. In L. M. Morrow, L. B. Gambrell, & M. Pressley (Eds.), *Best practices in literacy instruction* (2nd ed., pp. 127–142). New York: The Guildford Press.
- Kurth, L. A., Anderson, C. W., & Palincsar, A. S. (2002). The case of Carla: Dilemmas of helping *All* students to understand science. *Science Education*, 86, 287-313.
- Liberman, I. Y., & Liberman, A. M. (1992). Whole language versus code emphasis: Underlying assumptions and their implications for reading instruction. In P. B. Gough, L. C. Ehri, & R. Treiman (Eds.), *Reading acquisition* (pp. 343-366). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- McCarthy, S. J. (2001). Identity construction in elementary readers and writers. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 36, 122-151.
- McKenna, M. C. (1994). Toward a model of reading attitude acquisition. In E. H. Cramer & M. Castle (Eds.) *Fostering the love of reading: The affective domain* (pp. 18-40). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- McLachlan-Smith, C. J., & St. George, A. M. (2000). “Children learn by doing”: Teachers’ beliefs about learning, teaching and literacy in New Zealand kindergartens. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, 35, 37-47.
- McNaughton, S. (1995). *Patterns of emergent literacy: Processes of development and transition*. Auckland: Oxford University Press.
- McNaughton, S. (2002). *Meeting of minds*. Wellington: Learning Media.
- McNaughton, S., Phillips, G., & MacDonald, S. (2000). Curriculum channels and literacy development over the first year of instruction. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, 35, 49-59.
- McWilliams, K. G. (2006). *An analysis of variables affecting instructional efficiency*. Unpublished PhD thesis: University of Canterbury.
- Mehan, H. (1978). Structuring school structure. *Harvard Educational Review*, 48, 32-64.
- Merriam, S. (2002). *Qualitative research in practice: Examples for discussion and analysis*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- Michel, P. (1994). *The child's view of reading: Understandings for teachers and parents*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Ministry of Education (1993). *The New Zealand curriculum framework, Te Anga Marautanga o Aotearoa*. Wellington: Learning Media.
- Ministry of Education (1994). *English in the New Zealand curriculum*. Wellington: Learning Media.
- Ministry of Education (1996). *The Learner as a reader: Developing reading programmes*. Wellington: Learning Media.
- Ministry of Education (2003). *Effective literacy practice in Years 1 to 4*. Wellington: Learning Media.
- Mohr, K. A. J. (2006). Children's choices for recreational reading: A three-part investigation of selection preferences, rationales, and processes. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 38, 81–104.
- Nicholson, T. (2000). *Reading the writing on the wall: Debates, challenges and opportunities in the teaching of reading*. Palmerston North: Dunmore Press.
- Nicholson, T., & Lam, R. (1998). Whole-language teachers and phonics: Not “Do they?” but “How much is enough?” *Set: research information for teachers*, No. 2, item 6. Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research.
- Nuthall, G. A. (1999). Learning how to learn: the evolution of students' minds through the social processes and culture of the classroom. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 31, 139-256.
- Nuthall, G. A. (2000a). *How children remember what they learn at school*. Wellington: NZCER.
- Nuthall, G. A. (2000b). *Project on learning – A report on progress and an invitation to join us*. Christchurch: Education Department, University of Canterbury.
- Nuthall, G. A. (2000c). The role of memory in the acquisition and retention of knowledge in science and social studies units. *Cognition and Instruction*, 18, 83-139.
- Nuthall, G. A. (2000d, September). *Understanding how classroom experience shapes students' minds*. Kongress der Deutschen Gessellschaft für Erziehungswissenschaft, Göttingen.
- Nuthall, G. A. (2000e). The anatomy of memory in the classroom: Understanding how students acquire memory processes from classroom activities in science and social studies units. *American Educational Research Journal*, 37, 247-304.
- Nuthall, G. A. (2000f, December). *Understanding what students learn in school*. Paper presented at the Annual Conference NZARE, Hamilton.

- Nuthall, G. A. (2001a, April). *Student experience and the learning process: Developing an evidence based theory of classroom learning*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the AERA, Seattle.
- Nuthall, G. A. (2001b, August). *Bridging the gaps: The interactive effects of instruction and social processes on student experience and learning outcomes in science and social studies activities*. Paper presented at the 9th Biennial Conference, European Association for Research on Learning and Instruction, Fribourg, Switzerland.
- Nuthall, G. A. (2001c). *Project on learning: Classroom recording and data analysis*. Christchurch: Education Department, University of Canterbury.
- Nuthall, G. A. (2002, October). *Knowing what we know and need to know about effective teaching*. Conference Proceedings: Teachers Make A Difference - What is the research evidence? New Zealand Council for Educational Research.
- Nuthall, G. A. (2004a). Relating classroom teaching to student learning: A critical analysis of why research has failed to bridge the theory-practice gap. *Harvard Educational Review*, 74, 273-306.
- Nuthall, G. A. (2004b). Kim Hill interview with Professor Graham Nuthall, University of Canterbury. Radio New Zealand, 21 February.
- Nuthall, G. A. (2005). The cultural myths and realities of teaching and learning: A personal journey. *Teachers College Record*, 107, 895-934.
- Nuthall, G. A., & Alton-Lee, A. G. (1994). How pupils learn. *Set: research information for teachers*, No. 2, item 3. Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research.
- O'Toole, V. M. (2005). *Thank you for giving me this opportunity to actually tell you what I know: The role of emotion in children's learning task engagement in the elementary school classroom*. Unpublished PhD thesis: University of Canterbury.
- Palincsar, A. S. (1999). Applying a sociocultural lens to the work of a transition community. *Discourse Processes*, 27, 161-171.
- Palincsar, A. S., & Herrenkohl, L. R. (1999). Designing collaborative learning contexts. In A. O'Donnell, & A. King (Eds.), *Cognitive perspectives on peer learning* (pp. 151-178). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Press.
- Paris, S. G., Lipson, M. Y., & Wixson, K. K. (1994). Becoming a strategic reader. In R. B. Ruddell, M. R. Ruddell, & H. Singer (Eds.), *Theoretical models and processes of reading* (4th ed., pp. 788-810). Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association.
- Pearson, P. D. (1993). Teaching and learning reading: A research perspective. *Language Arts*, 70, 502-511.

- Perry, N. E., Nordby, C. J., & VandeKamp, K. O. (2003). Promoting self-regulated reading and writing at home and school. *The Elementary School Journal*, 103, 317-338.
- Phillips, G., & McNaughton, S. (1990). The practice of storybook reading to preschool children in mainstream New Zealand families. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 25, 196-212.
- Pinsent, C. (2002). School reading programmes: The intersection of curriculum, readers and educators. In P. Adams & H. Ryan (Eds.), *Learning to read in Aotearoa New Zealand: A collaboration between early childhood educators, families and schools* (pp. 224-242). Palmerston North: Dunmore Press Limited.
- Pressley, M. (2002). *Reading instruction that works: The case for balanced teaching* (2nd ed.). New York: The Guildford Press.
- Pressley, M., Allington, R. L., Wharton-McDonald, R., Block, C. C., & Morrow, L. M. (2001). *Learning to read: Lessons from exemplary first-grade classrooms*. New York: The Guildford Press.
- Purcell-Gates, V. (1996). Stories, coupons, and the 'TV Guide': Relationships between home literacy experiences and emergent literacy knowledge. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 31, 406-428.
- Rathgen, E. H. (2006). In the voice of teachers: The promise and challenge of participating in classroom-based research for teachers' professional learning. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 22, 580-591.
- Reid, J. F. (1966). Learning to think about reading. *Educational Research*, 9, 56-62.
- Reifel, S. (1988). Children's thinking about their early education experiences. *Theory Into Practice*, 27, 62-66.
- Rosenshine, B. (1983). Teaching functions in instructional programs. *The Elementary School Journal*, 83, 335-351.
- Schunk, D. H. (2004). *Learning theories: An educational perspective* (4th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education Inc.
- Searfoss, L. W., Readence, J. E., & Mallette, M. H. (2001). *Helping children learn to read: Creating a classroom literacy environment* (4th ed.). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Shuell, T. J. (1996). Teaching and learning in a classroom context. In D. C. Berliner & R. C. Calfee (Eds.), *Handbook of educational psychology* (pp. 726-764). New York: Macmillan Library Reference USA.
- Slavin, R. E. (2003). *Educational psychology: Theory and practice* (7th ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

- Smith, A. B. (1995, December). *Incorporating children's perspectives into research: Challenge and opportunity*. Paper presented at the annual conference of the New Zealand Association for Research in Education, Palmerston North.
- Smith, F. (1977). Making sense of reading – And of reading instruction. *Harvard Educational Review*, 47, 386–395.
- Smith, A. B. & Taylor, N. J. (2000). The sociocultural context of childhood: balancing dependency and agency. In A. B. Smith, N. J. Taylor, & M. M. Gollop (Eds.) *Children's voices: Research, policy and practice* (pp. 1–17). Auckland: Pearson Education New Zealand Limited.
- Smolkin, L. B., & Donovan, C. A. (2001). The contexts of comprehension: The information book read aloud, comprehension acquisition, and comprehension instruction in a first-grade classroom. *The Elementary School Journal*, 102, 97–122.
- Snow, C. E., Burns, S., & Griffin, P. (Eds.) *Preventing reading difficulties in young children*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- Snowman, J., & Biehler, R. (2006). *Psychology applied to teaching* (11th ed.). Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Spiegel, D. L. (1994). A portrait of parents of successful readers. In E. H. Cramer & M. Castle (Eds.), *Fostering the love of reading: The affective domain* (pp. 74–87). Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association.
- St George, A., & Cullen, J. (1999). Social life and learning: Peer scaffolding in a new entrant classroom. *Set: research information for teachers*, No. 1, item 4.
- Stahl, S. A., & Heubach, K. M. (2005). Fluency-oriented reading instruction. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 37, 25–60.
- Stanovich, K. (1986). Matthew effects in reading: Some consequences of individual differences in the acquisition of literacy. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 21, 360–407.
- Stuart, M., Dixon, M., Masterson, J., & Quinlan, P. (1998). Learning to read At home and school. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 68, 3–14.
- Sturman, A. (1999). Case study methods. In J. P. Keeves & G. Lakomski (Eds.), *Issues in educational research* (pp. 103 – 112). Oxford: Elsevier Science Ltd.
- Sulzby, E. (1985). Children's emergent reading of favourite storybooks: A developmental study. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 20, 458–481.
- Taylor, S. J., & Bogdan, R. (1984). *Introduction to qualitative research methods: The search for meanings* (2nd ed.). New York: Wiley-Interscience.

- Teale, W. (1984). Reading to young children: Its significance for literacy development. In H. Goelman, A. Oberg, & F. Smith (Eds.), *Awakening to literacy* (pp. 110-121). Exeter, NH: Heinemann Educational Books.
- Tolich, M., & Davidson, C. (1999). *Starting fieldwork: An introduction to qualitative research in New Zealand*. Auckland: Oxford University Press.
- Tunmer, W. E., & Chapman, J. (1999). Teaching strategies for word identification. In G. B. Thompson & T. Nicholson (Eds.), *Learning to read: Beyond phonics and whole-language*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Tunmer, W. E., Chapman, J., Ryan, H. E., & Prochnow, J. E. (1998). The importance of providing beginning readers with explicit training in phonological processing skills. *Australian Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 3, 4-14.
- Wasik, B. H., Dobbins, D. R., & Herrmann, S. (2001). Intergenerational family literacy: Concepts, research, and practice. In S. B. Neuman & D. K. Dickinson (Eds.) *Handbook of early literacy research, Volume 1* (pp. 444-458). New York: The Guildford Press.
- Weaver, C. (1990). *Understanding whole language: From principles to practice*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Wells, G. (1999). *Dialogic inquiry: Toward a sociocultural practice and theory of education*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Whitehurst, G. J., & Lonigan, C. J. (2001). Emergent literacy: Development from prereaders to readers. In S. B. Neuman & D. K. Dickinson (Eds.), *Handbook of Early Literacy Research Volume 1* (pp. 11-29). New York: The Guildford Press.
- Wigfield, A., & Guthrie, J. T. (1997). Relations of children's motivation for reading to the amount and breadth of their reading. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 89, 420-432.
- Wilson, R. M., Hall, M., Leu, D. J. Jr., & Kinzer, C. K. (2001). *Phonics, phonemic awareness, and word analysis for teachers: An interactive tutorial* (7th ed.). New Jersey: Merrill Prentice Hall.
- Winne, P. H., & Marx, R. W. (1982). Students' and teachers' views of thinking processes for classroom learning. *The Elementary School Journal*, 82, 492-518.
- Wylie, C. (1994). The too hard basket? Closing the gap between parents and teachers. *Set: research information for teachers, No. 1*, item 4. Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research.
- Wylie, C. (2002). Children's competency and reading: What children need to bring with them to school. In P. Adams & H. Ryan (Eds.) *Learning to read in Aotearoa New Zealand* (pp. 213 – 223). Palmerston North: Dunmore Press Ltd.

Appendix 1: Human Ethics Committee Approval

22 March 2004

Michelle Clarke
Department of Education
UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY

Dear Michelle

The Human Ethics Committee advises that your research proposal **“Children’s Understanding of what “Reading” Is: Exploring how this develops during the first year at school.”** has been considered and approved.

Yours sincerely

Rebekah Carson
Secretary

<https://webmail.canterbury.ac.nz/MBX/mvc17/ATT:IMAP:749/1/Clarke.04.14.doc>

Appendix 2: Information sheets

Focus family information sheet
(Initially labelled “participant” information sheet)

University of Canterbury

School of Education

INFORMATION

I would like to invite your son/daughter, _____, to participate in a research project called *Children’s understanding of what “reading” is: exploring how this develops during the first year at school*.

The aim of this project is to explore children’s ideas about what reading is, why people choose to read, and how you learn to read. This will also be looked at in relation to everyday classroom reading activities.

This project will involve me interviewing _____ and talking to him/her about reading, collecting examples of _____’s work and related school records, and spending time observing in the classroom. I anticipate that this will continue through Terms 2 – 4 of the 2004 school year. I would also like to discuss reading and _____’s reading interests with you, and with _____’s teacher.

You, or _____, have the right to withdraw from the project at any time, and can withdraw any information that you have provided.

To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, pseudonyms will be used for all children taking part, and any identifying information will be locked in the School of Education during the project and then destroyed. The results of the project may be published, but you may be assured of the complete confidentiality of information gathered. Children will not be identified without your consent.

The project is being carried out to fulfil the requirements for my M.A. thesis under the supervision of Associate Professor Alison Gilmore and Dr Elody Rathgen. If you have any concerns or further questions we can be contacted at the School of Education, University of Canterbury on 03 364 7001.

The project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee.

Participant family information sheet
(initially labelled “classmate” information sheet)

University of Canterbury

School of Education

INFORMATION – for parents of classmates

I will be undertaking a research project called *Children’s understanding of what “reading” is: exploring how this develops during the first year at school* in your son/daughter’s classroom this year.

The aim of this project is to explore children’s ideas about what reading is, why people choose to read, and how you learn to read. This will also be looked at in relation to everyday classroom reading activities.

While _____ is not a participant in the project, he/she will be involved in classroom activities that I will be observing throughout Terms 2 – 4 of the 2004 school year. This may mean that _____’s comments or actions provide information that becomes part of the project. You, or _____, have the right to withdraw any information provided at any time.

To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, pseudonyms will be used for all children taking part, and any identifying information will be locked in the School of Education during the project and then destroyed. The results of the project may be published, but you may be assured of the complete confidentiality of information gathered. Children will not be identified without your consent.

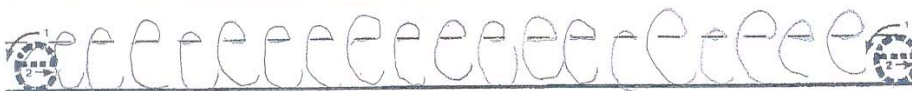
The project is being carried out to fulfil the requirements for my M.A. thesis under the supervision of Associate Professor Alison Gilmore and Dr Elody Rathgen. If you have any concerns or further questions we can be contacted at the School of Education, University of Canterbury on 03 364 7001.

The project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee.

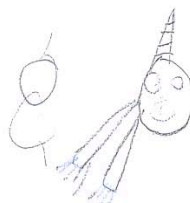
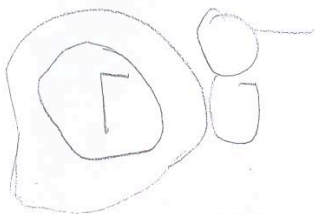
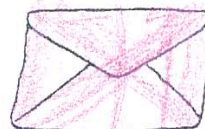
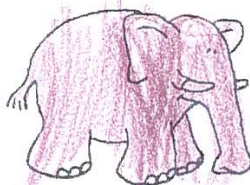
Appendix 3: A selection of worksheets



Trace the letters.
Write them on the lines.







Say the name of each picture.
Color the pictures that start with Ee.








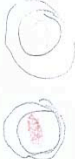
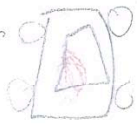

Brave Father Mouse 4d

Put a ring round the words that start the same

cat are come	Timothy too for	fire look like	we And Ann
Dog Paul David	went wake mouse	for too find	fire home here

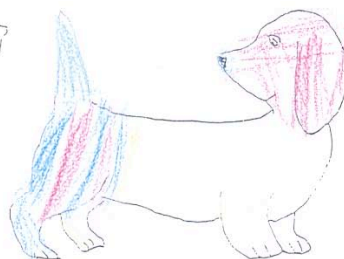
 cat	 mouse
 hat	 house

Draw

 cat	 cats	 dog	 dogs
 hat	 hats	 car	 cars



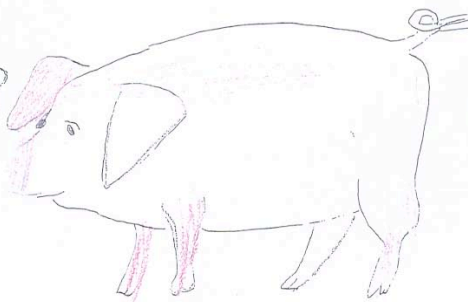
Where is my tail?
said the dog.



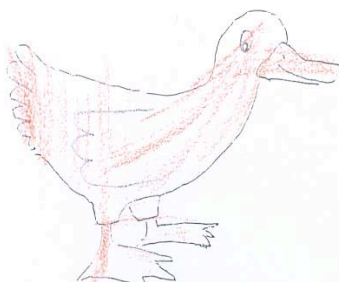
Where is my ear?
said the cat.



Where is my nose?
said the pencil.



Where are my wings?
said the pencil.






Appendix 4: Selected pages from the focus children's R.E.A.D I.T books

Date & Title	Comment	Number of Days
Mon 14/6 Mum	Very very tired tonight! Still managed to read most of it. Great job!	1
Tues 15/6 Dad	Read with more enthusiasm tonight. Big improvement!	2
Wed 16/6 Mums & Dads	Great effort! Most words said correctly!	3
Thurs 17/6 A	Enjoyed reading this book. To both mum & dad!	4
Fri 18/6	Forgot to write on Friday! Good book. Well done!	5
Comment: Brian watched and listens, following instructions carefully. Date 21/06/04		
Mon 21/6 What Goes Up	Seems to have learnt a few more words!	6
Tues 22/6 Dinner	Enjoyed reading this book!	7
Wed 23/6 What Comes Down	Well Done!	8
Thurs 24/6 Down to Town	Read this book to mums. Mums very impressed!	9
Fri 25/6 Bubbles	Great Reading! Mums!	10
Comment: A great start to Reading. Date 28/06/04		

4

For your CHILD to do.

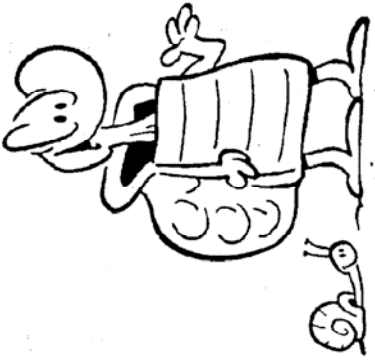
Your child has the opportunity to show what they felt about the reading they have done by giving the faces a smile, frown or just a straight line for the mouth. (Hair, ears, glasses etc. can be added too.)

KEEP COUNT OF the NUMBER OF NIGHTS that reading has taken place (to be shown in the right hand column).

The idea of this book is that it should be used as a record of what is read during the week (Mon-Fri).

N.B. If a night is missed the child could read BEFORE going to school.



Although we realise that reading is done during the weekend, part of the idea of this book is to form good reading habits during the week.


**FRIDAY NIGHT
COULD BE DONE
OVER THE WEEKEND**

Provision is made for reading to occur over school vacations and public holidays.

5

Date & Title	Comment	😊😊😊	Number of Days
Mon 6/9/04 Wee Wee My Hat	Good reading (found it a bit hard)	😊😊😊	
Tues 7/9/04 Wake up Dad	good reading but struggled a little on bones	😊😊😊	
Wed 8/9/04 Merry Goleard	Well read Emphasized Dark Woods	😊😊😊	
Thurs 9/9/04 Tiger Tiger	Good reading completing words to word cards is the	😊😊😊	
Fri 12/9/04 The Hazy Pig	good reading	😊😊😊	
Comment Great Progress Bomber			
Date 13/09/04			
Mon 13/9/04 Hearings is Hug	Triple Sound out words by spelling them	😊😊😊	
Tues 14/9/04 The Little Snow man	Trying to sound out harder words,	😊😊😊	
Wed 15/9/04 A Birthday cake for Ben	enjoyed this book	😊😊😊	
Thurs 16/9/04 The Big Wreck	likes all about cracking all over the fence!	😊😊😊	
Fri 17/9/04 SAD EGGS	great reading	😊😊😊	
Comment Bomber enjoys reading with us			
Date 4/10/04			

16



SOME THINGS TO DO

Do encourage your child to guess what the story is about.

Do praise your child when an idea or word is used that you know will come up in the story.

Do ask questions like:-
 "What can you tell about the story from the picture?"
 "What do you think will happen in the story?"

Do read from the pictures, encouraging your child to build up a story before looking at the print.

Do talk about the start of the story, what happened by the end of the story, the people in the story....etc.

Do mention things like:-
 The person who wrote the story - *the author*.
 The person who did the illustrations - *the illustrator*.

Find these people on the front cover of the book. Where else can you find their names?



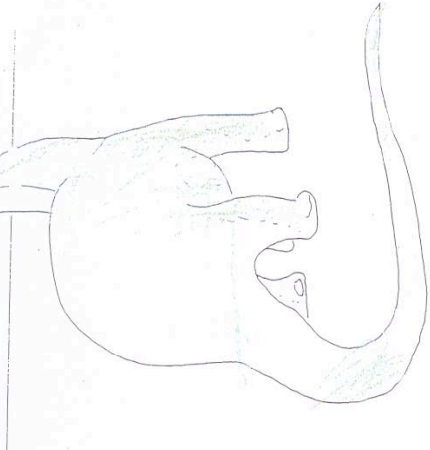
17



Appendix 5: Interview topics

The following list provides an outline of broad topics discussed during interviews, rather than the specific questions that were asked.

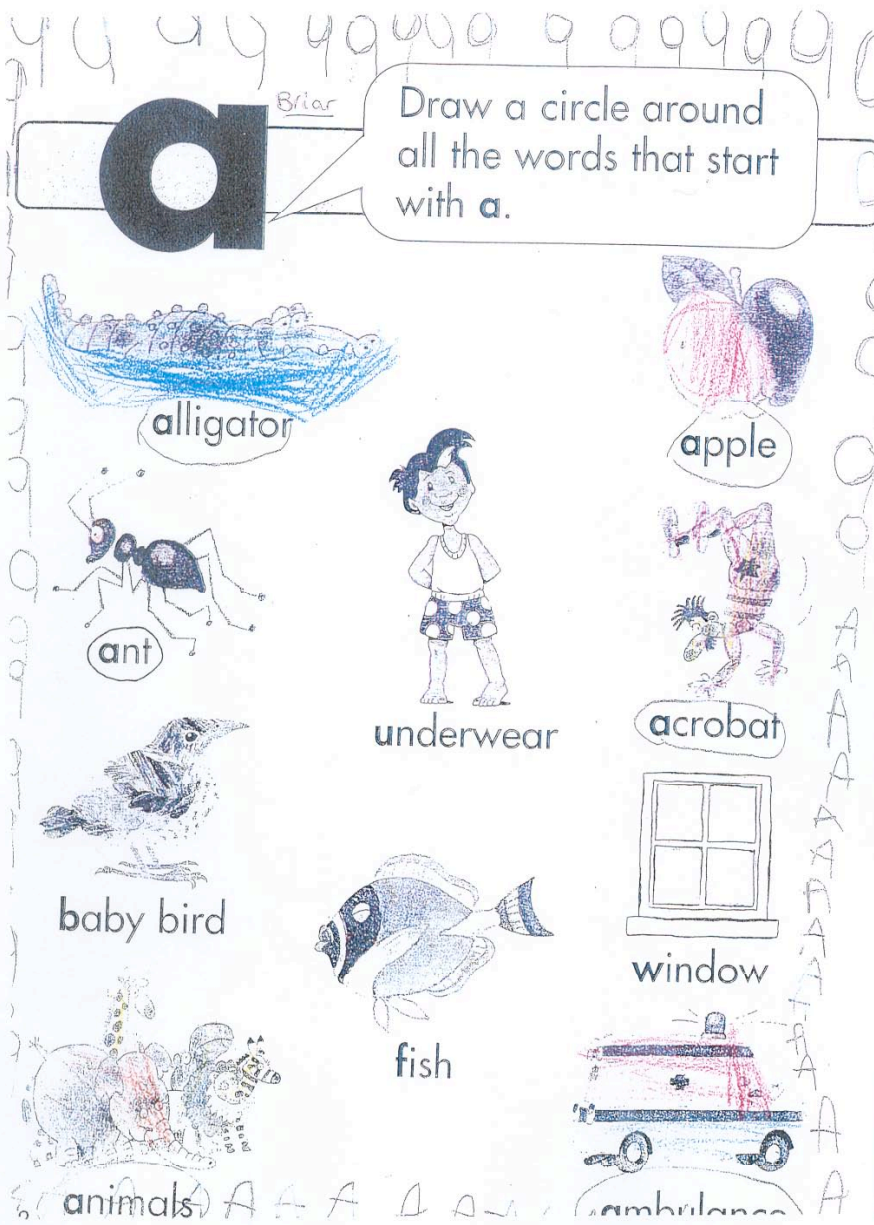
- What is reading all about?
- When and where do you read/learn to read?
- What do you read/learn to read?
- How do you read/learn to read?
- What do you do when you read/learn to read?
- What happens when you read/learn to read?
- What happens when you get stuck when you are reading?
- What/who helps you read/learn to read?
- Who do you read/learn to read with?
- Who do you like to read with/learn to read with?
- Why do you read/learn to read?
- Do you like to read/learning to read?
- What do you like to read?
- What do you like to do when you read/learn to read?
- What is the best thing about reading/learning to read?
- What is the worst thing about reading/learning to read?
- What do books tell you about?
- Why do you read books?
- Why are there pictures in books?
- Why are there words in books?
- Has anything about reading changed since you started school?
- What are your favourite things to do?

Appendix 6: Big worksheets

<p>(big) (big)</p>	<p>and (big)</p>	<p>(big) and</p>	<p>Father (big) (big) Mother</p>	
				
<p>A big whale A big whale</p>	<p>A big dinosaur</p>			

big	big	big	turner	big
big	big	big	big	Mother
				
A big whale			A big dinosaur	
A big whale			A big dinosaur	

Appendix 7: A worksheets



Handwritten scribbles at the top of the page.

Bomber

a

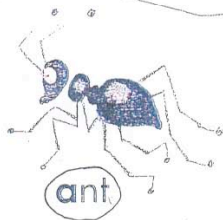
Draw a circle around
all the words that start
with a.



alligator



apple



ant



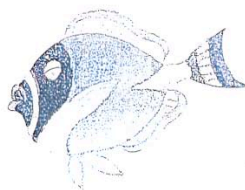
underwear



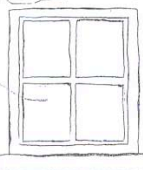
acrobat



baby bird



fish



window



animals



ambulance

Appendix 8: k worksheet

R R R R R R R R R R

Draw a line from the kangaroo to each picture that begins with the "k" sound.

